A MONTH'S CARAVAN TOUR IN FIVE COUNTIES

FLEUR DE LYS

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BY

"FLEUR DE LYS"

LIVERPOOL
EDWARD HOWELL 83 CHURCH STREET
—
1911

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PREFACE.

It gives me much pleasure to write a few forewords to the "Story of a Caravan Tour," by FLEUR DE LYS. *The subject is a fascinating one. It takes one back from the whirl of modern locomotion to the stately movement of a former age. In the far East even of to-day one has to choose between the rapid transit of the "Chappar" and the slower but surer Caravan. Though the motorist and the airman have arrived to stay, their pastimes are for the rich alone. To him or to her who cares for the real country—the sights and sounds and scents of fields and byeways—the Caravan offers the only opportunity of becoming acquainted with the secrets and fascinations of nature as it is. With van and horse the traveller may avoid the dust of the main roads and escape from the discomforts and distractions of the British tavern. If the*

van be roomy, the horse trustworthy, the weather propitious, and the company good-humoured, there cannot be a more delightful holiday. Self-help and self-entertainment are necessary qualifications for the traveller. The offices and occupations—the harnessing, the cooking, the routine of each day—must be assigned and accepted beforehand, and there must be someone ready to cope with the vagaries of a possible "Modestine." Given the fulfilment of these conditions, who can deny that the subject matter of this book presents a study at once attractive and captivating. The writer has built up her story upon a tour recently undertaken, and most of the incidents are "true to life." To this basis she has added the charm of her own story, and the reader cannot fail to appreciate the instructive and sympathetic interest with which she has approached her subject. It is a real pleasure to turn from the problems and agitations of most modern books to a contemplation of peaceful pursuits and natural life. I heartily congratulate the Authoress upon this, her first effort, and trust it is only the beginning of further literary achievement.

ELLIS J. GRIFFITH, M.P.

August 20, 1910.

The Authoress has subsequently learned that two of the ladies referred to in the following pages have undertaken a Caravan tour through seven counties entirely alone, and managed without any assistance a big cart horse. They were enabled to do so owing to their varied experiences with horses, but it would not be wise for any ladies to go, unattended, such a trip without being accustomed to horse flesh.

August 23, 1910.

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A MONTH'S CARAVAN TOUR THROUGH FIVE COUNTIES.

CHAPTER I.

"Nature is a good guide through life! and the love of simple pleasures next, if not superior to virtue."

—*R. L. Stevenson.*

WOODFIELD FARMYARD presented a picturesque appearance, situated as it was on a slope facing westward. It lay now bathed in the rays of a brilliant May sunset; the month was well towards its close, and the scent of lilacs and hawthorns filled the air; various animals were scattered about the yard. Two girls could be seen busily engaged beside a large caravan, newly painted, the sides of which held wide shelves, on which rested pots of marguerites and scarlet geraniums; these, mixed with their green foliage, looked remarkably effective against the white and red stripes with which the van was decorated!

Perched on the roof was a young girl trying to fix a white canopy edged with red, intended to keep off the heat of the sun as the van moved along the hot and dusty roads; she was a small but well

proportioned little damsel, dressed in a light green linen frock, and on her head was a Panama hat, trimmed with the same cool colour. She certainly seemed to be in rather a perilous position as she attempted to fasten the loops to the roof of the caravan. "Take care, Mops," shouted a girl who was polishing brasses close to the shafts, "you look pretty dicky up there!"

As she spoke, a young man came through the gate, calling out: "Haven't you girls finished yet? I am as hungry as a hunter." He was of medium height, well set up and smart looking in his apparel; the Norfolk suit and leggings were faultlessly neat, he was clean shaven, and possessed a sharp good-humoured countenance. At that moment a merry twinkle passed over his eyes, for a mischievous idea occurred to him.

What he had seen was a ladder leaning against the caravan, and the girl on the roof. Bounding forward he seized the steps, and removed them quite out of reach. "I don't care," cried Milicent Foster, whose nickname was Mops, "I can get down by the wheel quite well when I want to." The young fellow paid no heed to her remark but passed along to his wife, who was polishing. He took the rag from her hand, saying: "Let me do this, old girl, you'll rub all the flesh off your fingers; sit down, and I can finish these."

Dora Sinclair did as she was bid, and sat herself on an upturned bucket, drawing off her polishing gloves as she did so; her tall slim figure, attired in a blue cotton, looked very graceful, while from beneath her large shady hat an aristocratic small-featured face smiled amiably on her husband.

"Now, Jack, do put that ladder back for Mops to get down," said the girl. "She is certain to do something foolish if you don't."

"What took her up there at all? She should have let Bill put that canopy to rights."

"Did you ever know Bill do anything right by himself, Jack? I don't want to insult your cousin, but he always reminds me of that man at the circus, who wears long-fingered gloves, and runs about patting and smoothing everything, tumbling over every obstacle as he goes along!"

"That's true, mum, poor old Bill was born under an unlucky planet, sure enough. Keep where you are, Mops," he cried, "or you will break your neck."

As he said this, he sprang on to the wheel, and took possession of two small feet dangling down the side; thus imprisoned the girl was forced to remain where she was. At that moment a voice was heard calling in the distance:

"Young people, when are you coming to supper? It has been ready this half-hour," and as she spoke, an elderly lady appeared in the yard. She was nice-looking, slight and active, with strongly marked features, and a very dignified carriage.

"Hello, Grannie, right you are," cried Jack. He now seized the unfortunate Mops, and she, losing her balance, fell into his arms, but was soon placed on *terra firma*.

"Jack, Jack," shrieked the old lady, "how highly improper, you terrible fellow. Why on earth did you get up on to the van, Milly?" All this was said in one breath.

"Jack took the ladder away, Grannie, I was all right till he came," said the girl, shaking with laughter. Her face was all animation, her eyes, complexion and hair golden, an uncommon mixture, but quite her own, nevertheless. The agility and lightness of her movements gave no evidence of her having been in any danger. The tone of her voice was so deep that people started to

hear such notes and intonations proceeding from such a small person.

"My dear girl," remarked Mrs. Loftus, "there is no accounting for Jack's frivolity; he is so reckless, and full of nonsense. I put him down as quite hopeless!"

"Not quite so bad as that, mother dear," said her daughter, "he is always the life and soul of everything."

"He is a very naughty lad," asserted the lady, who, notwithstanding her reproaches, was exceedingly fond and proud of her son-in-law. "Put these things away in the caravan and give Gipsy her supper, Billy." This was addressed to Jack's cousin, a tall, lanky youth and rather seedy looking; he had a pleasant face, but his complexion was pallid and delicate. He sauntered leisurely along, making no reply; his hands were in his pockets, his pipe in his mouth; everything he did was in a dreamy half-hearted fashion.

Half an hour later the family were seated in changed garments round the dining table laden with excellent food. They fell soon to discussing a pair of ducks, and thoroughly enjoyed one of Betty's renowned salads. Betty was the cook and household manager at the farm; she had been there ever since Dora's marriage, having lived with her and her mother previously.

As they were in the midst of their repast, in lounged Master Billy, looking unkempt and absent-minded as usual.

"Did you put those things back in the caravan, Bill?" enquired Dora.

"Yes, and locked the door, here's the key," mumbled the young man as he slid into his place.

"I wonder if you fed Gipsy." This remark

came in a deep quizzical voice from Milicent, who was never guilty of forgetting an animal herself.

"No, by jove, I forgot old Gip," laughed he.

"Then you ought to go without your supper, you indolent youth," cried the astonished old lady.

"And so he shall," came from the master of the farm.

"Never fear, Grannie, I'll make him trot. Here, you lazy beggar, off you go at once, feed and water the poor mare, as I told you, and not till you have accomplished this do you taste one bite of supper. What on earth are you going to do with him in the caravan?" said Jack, turning to his wife, and whilst she hesitated as to what to say, Milicent, who was discussing Billy with Mrs. Loftus, called out, smiling: "Leave him to me, Dora, I'll bustle him round. He shan't forget Gipsy, any way."

It was now fast getting dusk, but not too dark for Dora to espy, from her seat, the figure of a man walking up the drive.

"Well I never, here's Falstaff coming. What on earth does he want at this time of day? And where to goodness has he dropped from?"

Before anyone had time to reply in walked a broad jolly-looking man, with a red face and jovial appearance.

"What ho, comrades! Canst thee give me a shake down for the night? I've come for a chat with the master. Gadzooks, I see thou hast that comely wench with thee, Mistress Sinclair. Prithee, may I sup?"

"Where on earth do you think you can sleep, Mr. Bouverie," exclaimed Mrs. Loftus, "we are full up."

"In the caravan," suggested Dora.

"Surely not," echoed Mops, "he'd upset everything; I'd put him in the coal hole."

"Well I'm blowed, thou scurvy varlet," responded Jack in Falstaff's lingo. "Why didn't you wire? By my hallidame, we've nothing left but the bath, and to that you are welcome—"

"As the flowers in May," whispered Mops.

"By my troth, I count that settled. Forsooth, I thank thee, fair damsel, for thy pretty speech!"

"Had your dinner, old chap?"

"Rather," said Mr. Bouverie, who, nevertheless, tried to squeeze himself into a seat close to Mrs. Loftus, who instantly withdrew to the sofa.

"Dined at the Ritz," continued the gentleman, "took a taxi to Liverpool Street station, caught 7-10 train, walked to Epping and took a dog cart to this very gate. And now, Jack, my boy, I want your advice for this scheme of mine, before handing over the money to the firm. Splendid opportunity, safe investment, plenty capital, roaring dividends. Gadzooks! fortunes made in two years. I tell you it's ripping, old pal."

Jack did not appear very enthusiastic, and as he handed the wine to his guest, said: "We will discuss this matter to-morrow. At present we are all dead tired. Dora and Milly are off to-morrow with the caravan and old Gipsy, on a tour through five counties!"

"By themselves?" enquired Bouverie in a surprised tone.

"No," replied his host, laughing quietly, "they are to be accompanied by the very able carrier and courier, William Acton Sinclair, who takes the tent under the caravan to sleep in."

"Humph," muttered Falstaff, as he helped himself to wine, and after a moment's silence, he addressed Dora in his most fascinating manner. "How now, mistress; methinks Will and I might

change places. I'll warrant to suit you better, for can I not wait deftly on two such sweet dames, to say nothing of courting yonder wench? Forsooth, is it not the merrie month of May?"

"I would not have thee court or wait on me, my liege, even shouldst thou shower thousands of golden pieces at my feet. What say you, Dora?"

"It strikes me if Falstaff were to join us, we should get no meals; all our crockery would get broken and our stove damaged, to say nothing of his falling over Daphne; he would also be found feeding Gipsy with whisky, no doubt. On the whole he would be worse than Bill."

"Come, ladies, why do you credit me with such a graceless character? You are extremely fickle, inconsequent and censorious, to your old pal Falstaff. Heigho," sighed he, "it's a beastly nuisance I'm getting so bald!" This speech made both girls laugh heartily, and Dora, fearing she had perhaps offended her friend, suggested they should look him up at his bungalow in Hertfordshire on their return journey.

"How extremely improper," muttered Mrs. Loftus, who was now half asleep on the sofa.

Falstaff chuckled good naturedly and immediately answered: "Right you are, Mistress Dora. Drop Benedict and myself a post card and you shall use one of our fields, and be treated by us both right royally."

With a little more badinage the party broke up and retired to their sleeping apartments. Mr. Bouverie was found a camp bed in a small dressing room, and with strict injunctions from Mrs. Loftus, who was now wide awake, to be up in good time in the morning, he bid her good-night and turned to Jack, saying: "Many thanks, old chap, for your kind hospitality. It's jolly nice to have such friends,

but I do believe Grannie thinks I have no business to tumble in on you like a cyclone!"

"Not a bit of it," said Jack yawning, "the dear lady is as pleased to see you as we are. And now to sleep and pleasant dreams! I'll call you early. So long."

CHAPTER II.

"Enchanters! Enchantresses!
Your gold makes you seem wise;
The morning mist within your grounds
More proudly rolls, more softly lies."
—*Emerson.*

At 6 a.m. the house and farm were agog; preparations for the departing caravan were in full swing, harness was undergoing its last furbishing by the groom, and Jack was putting the bonnie cart-horse on all her gay trappings, at the same time giving her some fresh oats. "Steady, Gipsy, steady, old girl," he cried, as the beast whisked her tail backwards and forwards, moving uneasily at the bark of an Aberdeen terrier, which followed its master everywhere, and was named Jezebel on account of her aggressive ways with other doggies—jealousy, no doubt.

Grannie was making the coffee, shouting at intervals to Mr. Bouverie to come and help with the toast, but, sad to relate, that gentleman was not yet out of the bathroom.

"I verily believe he has gone to sleep in the bath," she muttered to herself. Dora and her friend had been busily occupied putting finishing touches to the interior of the caravan, placing cushions, quilts, etc., and what clothes they required for their journey, having decided on another cotton dress apiece with an extra blouse, a change of underlinen, two smart

hats, and equipments for rainy weather. Then there was the indiarubber bath, toilet necessaries, and a small collection of pharmacy.

Both girls looked very attractive in their pink cotton frocks and Panama hats trimmed to match, and their merry laugh was heard when a problem arose as to where on earth this or that was to be fixed up.

The compartment inside contained two deck chairs which could be drawn out for sleeping on, a fixed box seat with a lid, which, covered with cushions, could be used as a sofa. The box was used for the bedding by day, and the clothes they wore daily, by night! A small table and two camp stools, with hooks in the corner over which hung a chintz curtain, and two small cupboards with mirrors, completed the furnishing of the interior. The small windows were draped with pretty muslin and pale blue ribbon, to match the eiderdown quilt and cushions; the whole appearance was cosy and dainty in the extreme. Under the waggon was fixed a tent occupied by the gentlemen at night, also a cooking stove and kitchen utensils. At the back of the van on either side of the steps were two cupboards opening outside; they held the china in one and clothes in the other. The box seat in front also opened for receptacles and was exceedingly comfortable, seating two persons, and covered by a thick canvas roof to shelter the occupants from sun and rain.

At the sound of the gong our party soon assembled round the breakfast table, again laden with food, to which they all did full justice.

"As usual," remarked Grannie, "Willie not here; has anyone seen him?"

"That reminds me," said Jack, "I never called him, and you bet he is fast snoozing in bed."

"Oh dear! Oh dear!" cried Dora. "Mops, do

go and ask Betty to call him and see he gets up, there's a good girl."

"I'll soon rouse him, never fear," yelled Mops as she flew upstairs, and what happened, history does not relate, but Billie put in an appearance just as the caravan drew up to the door ; he was dressed in a negligée fashion, a pair of corduroy knickers and leather leggings, a faded fawn coat, with a green cotton shirt and no collar, completed his costume. On his head hung a large hay straw hat, and, as Mrs. Loftus observed, he looked exactly like a tramp.

Falstaff now appeared on the scene and stood in the hall, with his face shining and his burly frame wrapped in his overcoat, very much in *déshabile*, to Mrs. Loftus' horror ! As she expressed her disapproval in an offended tone, it was like pouring water down a duck's back, for, quite unabashed, he approached the van where the girls stood watering the plants on the shelves.

"Shure, and it's Falstaff that is in time to give you the best send off ye ever had in your lives ! By my troth, what a slashing conveyance, manned by the daintiest maidens outside London. Willie, my boy, you ought to be proud to be in charge of such an equipage ! By gad, you've the look of a cowboy from the Far West."

"But what do you think of the mare ?" asked Jack, as he stroked the bonnie beast, decked in her shining harness and gay ribbons.

"Why ! She's just a topper to the cavalcade. May good luck follow them."

As they were talking, Willie quietly slunk into the dining room and was in the act of putting some food into his pocket, when Mrs. Loftus appeared, saying : "You've no time to waste, young man ; here are sandwiches," and handing him a cup of cold tea she hurried him away.

The caravan now began to move slowly down the avenue. "What a glorious morning," remarked Dora, as the chestnuts and laburnums swept the top of the car, dashing dew in their faces. They were both sitting on the box seat, and the fields around were scintillating as the sun shone on the mist which enshrined them ; the scent of wallflowers filled the air, the thrush was trilling its morning notes, while the lark sang its early praises, as it rose towards the heavens !

Milicent, who was very fond of poetry, recited softly :—

"All things are bright and fair !
All things are glad and free !
Lithe squirrels darting here and there,
While birds are echoing in the air,
Their song of Liberty !"

"What sweet words," exclaimed Dora, "this makes you quite poetic, doesn't it, Milly?"

"Yes," she replied heartily, "especially when we are followed by all the farmhouse dogs, barking and whining at the same time."

"For heaven's sake," shrieked Dora to her husband, "send away those dogs !" as she beheld them all scampering after the van. Excitement prevailed everywhere, and voices shouting out to the different dogs almost deafened Jack, who seized Daphne, the only one allowed to accompany the party, and placed her on the box seat beside his wife.

Daphne was a long chocolate-coloured Dachshund, with crooked feet, marvellous eyes, and a pathetic-looking face. She gazed up at the two girls, wagging her tail as much as to say : "I'm in luck's way, please keep me with you."

"Lie down, Daphne !" said Dora, patting her, and as she spoke the caravan swept out of the gate.

Billie cracked the whip he carried, and he turned Gipsy down the road.

"Don't do that, Bill, Gipsy wants no whip, it is only an ornament. Here, put it in its place." This was said in such a deep, emphatic tone by Mops, Bill had no choice but to obey. Then, whistling in a happy-go-lucky fashion the tune of "Fiddle and I," he sauntered along, in his usual dreamy fashion.

"A most appropriate tune, at any rate," laughed Dora, as she caught Milicent smiling.

CHAPTER III.

"Sweetly wooing scent
Enthralling hawthorn tree
Oh the sweet, sweet prime
Of the gay spring time!"
—*George Eliot*

The air had a spice of cold in it, though so late in May, and the bracing effect on the girls made them decide to get out and walk for some distance.

Bill lit his pipe and continued silent and listless. "I doubt that youth will be very little help without Jack," remarked Dora, as she cast her eyes on Billy's lazy stride. "I'm sure he doesn't understand the mare in the least."

"Never mind," answered Milicent, "he is quite good-natured and always does as he is asked if you watch him. We are only roughing it after all, Dora; this will suit him better than helping on the farm."

As they walked along they discussed the plan of the route they intended to take.

"My idea," said Dora, "after leaving Essex, is to go into Hertfordshire, straight through to Cambridgeshire and up as far north in that county as possible, returning *via* Huntingdon, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire into Essex once more, and we must take our chance of camping places for the night."

They passed through several villages, evidently attracting much attention ; it was soon midday, and the sun extremely hot, and the roads dusty.

"I'm desperately thirsty," Mops ventured to say.

"And I'm confoundedly hungry," muttered Bill.

They were at that time passing a broad stream over which hung a bridge, and near this the road made a curve forming a grassy plot. The hedges were covered with hawthorn, and some elder-berry bushes cast a grateful shade, backed by a tall elm tree.

"Let us halt here," said Dora. "Unfasten Gipsy, Bill, and let her graze here while you fetch us some water in the bucket."

The youth did as he was bid, but before giving the mare a drink Mops tried to reach some water to quench her thirst.

"Better not, Milly," said her friend, "it may be impure. Mother put some bottles of beer in the basket, and our lunch for to-day has been prepared by Betty See, here is a chicken, some tongue and a cob of her own baking, with a cup full of our own fresh butter."

"How delicious," exclaimed Mops.

"Hooray," chimed in Billy.

And didn't they all revel in this, their first *al fresco* meal in the open air Daphne grasped at intervals large portions of chicken, with a snap of her jaws, wagging her tail, and gazing at Dora as much as to say, "Arn't we a jolly set of tramps ?"

After repacking their chattels, they wandered on, looking about at intervals for a likely place to spend the night in. On nearing the village of M——— Dora begged Bill to go up and ask at a farm if they might be allowed to pass the night in an adjoining field, which she indicated to him. "And ask at the

same time if they can give us some water, Bill ; don't forget."

The caravan was now drawn close up to the hedge and the rest put to the shafts. Whilst Dora and Milly sat on the grassy mounds against the hedgerow they were somewhat startled by the whirr of a motor horn, and soon perceived a car coming rapidly towards them.

"It looks uncommonly like the Cunningham's," said Dora. "What fun if they recognise us," which they certainly did, for the motor slowed up as it reached the van, and a pleasant voice called out:

"Hello, Mrs. Sinclair! This is a surprise. What an experience for you!" And a young man stepped out of the car as he spoke, holding out his hand to Dora. "Where in the name of fortune do you hail from? How did you come along? And how long did you take to reach this?"

"Well! We don't exactly come along at motor speed ; we've been on the road since 8 a.m. this morning from Woodfield."

"I have heard of your caravan, Mrs. Sinclair, from my mother, but I've only just returned from a trip to Canada, and so have never seen this elegant equipage. I'm hanged if I shouldn't like to change places ; it is, I'm sure, a ripping way of spending a holiday, isn't it, Vivian?" and he turned to address his friend in the motor, who immediately aquiesced, declaring it to be awfully jolly.

By this time the young man caught sight of Mops, whose hair was all disarranged, and her hands blackened with the horse.

"Miss Milicent Foster, Mr. Ronald Cunningham," Dora introduced them awkwardly, laughing at the very untidy appearance they must both have presented.

"You are not both alone?" asked Ronald. "Who attends to the horse?"

"My husband's cousin," replied Dora. "He has just gone to ask permission for us to camp the night in this field; he sleeps in that tent," pointing to the canvas underneath the van.

"And for how long are you peregrinating?" enquired Ronald. "Can't you come our way on your return? I can give you a tip-top spot in Brosely Park to camp in. Just drop the mater a card; she will be delighted to receive you."

"It's very kind of you," thanked Mrs. Sinclair, "perhaps we might be able to manage it."

"There is some jolly fishing in the stream, a boat on the lake, plenty of fruit and flowers, all at your service." Billy was now to be seen bearing down upon the group with a dismayed countenance.

"They won't let us go into their fields," said he. "What are we to do?"

"I simply don't believe it," cried Mops in an energetic tone; "it takes me to manage these matters. Do let me go and ask, Dora."

"Well, you had better have another try; if they let anyone in, it will be you, Mops."

Off the girl started, but was detained by Dora shouting: "Wait a moment, you might as well look tidy! I expect Bill frightened them in that costume of his; let me fasten up your hair."

"Bother!" said the girl, looking shyly at the young men.

"Permit me," begged Ronald, "to wipe a smut from your face, little lady," and he drew a clean silk handkerchief from his pocket, ready to attack the offending smut.

"It's very good of you," said Milicent, smiling, and the girl took off her hat, asking Dora for a mirror.

"You are all right now, Mops, off you go." Away the girl flew, turning back to nod and smile at Ronald.

"That is a nice, jolly girl," said he, "is she a great friend of yours?"

"We were at school together, and there is not much we can't both tackle; we are excellent pals."

"I must say you are a plucky couple, and I wish you the best of luck, but regret we must now hurry off, as we are due to dine at Wareham Court at 7 p.m. *Au revoir*, Mrs. Sinclair," he called out, as he stepped into his car, and was soon out of sight.

Before long Bill espied Milicent tearing through the field, calling out all was right. "We may go in at that white gate," she shouted, "and take the caravan close under the plantation."

"What did you do, you will-of-the-wisp?" asked Billie. "How on earth did you get permission? Did you interview that crabbed old man?"

"Yes, and he was pretty surly at first, but his wife, a dear old dame, said: 'You might as well let them in, dad, they will do no harm,' and she called me 'my dear,' asking if we wanted milk, and to tell her if we required anything else. When I asked the old chap what his charges were, he mumbled something about it being a matter of a couple of shillings or so, but he cautioned me against breaking through them 'ere edges! So I promised; let us look sharp and get through the gate before he comes."

CHAPTER IV.

"When the bright sunset fills
The silver woods with light!
The green slope throws
Its shadows on the hills!"

Once turned into the fields, the difficulty was to get Gipsy to draw the van up the slope, which led to the shelter of the plantation. After shoving and pushing they landed it under the hedge which divided the meadow from an extensive wood, filled with fine trees, and a stiff undergrowth; the whole formed a suitable shelter from an east wind which was blowing at the time. Stretching away to the west lay the sloping ground up which they had struggled, and at the bottom were meadows filled with buttercups and clover; in some, cattle were grazing, others, lambs bleating. In the distance stood the farm buildings backed by an orchard in full blossom.

They unharnessed Gipsy and left her to roam at her leisure; the girls set about preparing tea, sending Bill for water. The table was placed on the grass close to the steps, and after lighting the stove they proceeded to boil the kettle and some eggs.

"I think I will go and interview the farmer's wife to procure some milk," said Dora, as she unhooked the can kept for that purpose.

"All right, Bill, and I will have tea ready when you return," and as soon as the cloth and cups and saucers were laid, Milicent began to look about her,

and espied over the hedge, right in the wood, some lovely wild blue hyacinths, and primroses. The mossy ground was carpeted. Thinking the flowers would embellish the tea table, the girl tried to climb the hedge, when suddenly the farmer's voice rang in her ears: "Don't break through them 'ere hedges."

"Oh my," thought she, "I'll be getting into trouble." She fancied she saw the man brandishing his stick at her; in sheer fright she tried to break away from the brambles which held her fast in the thicket.

"For heaven's sake, extricate me, Bill, from this dilemma." The young man, who was smoking, clumsily gave his assistance, unfortunately making matters worse by pulling the girl, instead of disentangling the thorns.

Poor Mops slipped the bank, tearing her clothes and scratching her face. Just as she was picking herself up and scolding Bill for his maladroitness, Dora appeared with a jug full of cream and some hot scones the farmer's wife had given her.

"What have you been doing?" she exclaimed as the girl appeared in her torn condition.

"Trying to get flowers for the tea table, but I saw the old farmer shaking his stick at me, and in my hurry I got stuck; much help that silly booby gave me, dragging me down the bank till I nearly broke my back."

"He is a silly," observed Dora, "but the farmer didn't see you, Mops; he was only driving off some geese that ran after me. 'Trespassers will be prosecuted,' you know. Never mind the flowers; let us have our tea, dear."

Very happy they were as they sat on the bank eating the scones and eggs and drinking their tea, with the excellent cream in addition.

The view before them was extensive and flat; the sun was rapidly descending, casting golden streaks of light on the meadows and hedgerows; gleams of brilliancy shot through the larches, oaks, and beeches of the plantation, shedding rays of light on the blue hyacinths and primroses. All was calm and peaceful; only the notes of the cuckoo were heard in the distance as Milicent's voice was repeating:

> "And the hyacinth, purple and white and blue,
> Which flings from the wood a sweet peal anew,
> Of music so delicate, soft and intense,
> It is felt like an odour within the sense."

"Whose lines are those, Milly?" asked Dora. "I can't remember the author; they just struck me as singularly applicable to our present surroundings."

"And so they are," replied her friend.

But Bill muttered something about poetry being rotten stuff and that he couldn't stand it.

"That's because you are so jolly commonplace, my dear fellow!" said his cousin Dora.

They wandered about for some time, then washed up their crockery, preparing the van for the night. Stars now bespangled the skies. Every planet and constellation was visible to the naked eye. Seldom had they gazed on such a glorious sight. The heavens were of an exquisite sapphire blue and it enhanced the beauty of its myriad lights; this was due to the pureness of the atmosphere, for there was no moon and yet it was quite as clear and light as day.

"Listen," said Dora, "what bird is that? Surely it is the nightingale, no bird sings like this so late." And it was to the song of this enthralling bird that both girls entered the caravan and settled themselves on their couches. It was some time before they fell asleep; the novelty was quite an

excitement to Milicent, who had never slept out of a house before, but she felt it had a very soothing effect. After talking about their future movements, Dora muttered in a drowsy tone :

"We must rest all one day, Milly, and travel by moonlight, well on into the night, when the moon is at the full."

"Yes," faintly echoed Mops. "Won't it be weird?"

"Ripping," sighed Dora ; and both girls were asleep.

It was Daphne who woke them next morning, scratching her mistress's bedclothes.

"Come along, old girl," said Dora, as she roused herself and opened the door of the van. "Oh, Milly, do get up and look at the sunrise, it is perfectly gorgeous ; I hope it is not a bad sign. How beautiful the scenery looks, quite different to a sunset."

"Yes, indeed," quoth Milicent. "Do you notice all the cattle are lying down? The shadows are reversed, and look strange, don't they?" There was a wonderful stillness about nature, and the girls felt awed. Only the trilling of blackbirds and the slow musical notes of the missel-thrush made themselves heard. The world was at rest ; it was just 5 a.m.

"I am always reminded of the Resurrection on mornings like these," solemnly added Dora.

"There is to me at this time a feeling as if the spirits of the departed were nearer us than they are at any other hour of the day," remarked Milicent in a reflective tone.

Both girls soon donned their ulsters and goloshes, following Daphne down the steps on to the grass, where the dog sprang about in sheer delight.

"Isn't this scrumptious?" they both exclaimed,

"What people do miss shut up in houses at this hour."

"Wouldn't it be jolly if we could find a place to bathe in?" cried Milicent.

"Too cold for anything of that sort in this climate," and Dora shivered as she spoke.

"Into the van you go back at once to your blankets, Dodo; we can leave the door open," and Milly proceeded to push her friend into the van. The grass was covered with dew, and not exactly the place for ladies donning night garments.

"I shall make some tea on the spirit lamp," said Dora. "Get out some biscuits, Mops. Shall we wake Billie? It is a wonder he has not heard us bobbing about. I don't think a cannon would rouse him before his usual time."

"And when is that, pray?" asked Milly.

"Oh, I can't say; he wants a wet sponge."

But already sundry noises came from the tent, and Bill appeared in front of the van.

"What on earth are you two doing, waking up a chap at this early hour?"

"Oh! you have no sense of the sublime in nature," said his cousin, "and still less sense of humour, or you wouldn't be standing there in your pyjamas looking like a scarecrow; your place is in the cornfield, for you are quite enough to frighten the birds!"

"Well, I'm blowed! You do take care of yourselves," said the young man, sniffing the tea.

"Get your coat on, and bring a cup from the outside cupboard, laddie, and we will give you some."

"Well! I don't mind if I do," said Billie, and after fetching his coat, he added cream and sugar to the enticing beverage and speedily demolished a whole plateful of biscuits.

Later on in the morning after breakfast they packed up their goods and chattels, harnessed the cart-horse, who had thoroughly enjoyed herself, and proceeded to move with the caravan on to the high road *en route* for their next destination.

There is always a feeling of regret in striking camp, and they were loth to leave their pleasant surroundings and kindly shelter. As they bid good-bye to the farmer and his wife, they thanked them for their hospitality and very soon they found themselves scouring the high roads once more, moving out of Essex into Hertfordshire.

CHAPTER V.

"In the country on every side,
Where far and wide stretches the plain,
To the dry grass and drier grain
How welcome is the rain."

"How beautiful is the rain,
After the dust and heat!
All down the narrow lane
The flowers smell so sweet
After the beautiful rain."

—*Longfellow.*

Our caravaners soon became much interested in their varied surroundings; the anticipation of a new neighbourhood, fresh faces and untried pastures, filled them with pleasure; it is always the unknown that fascinates.

The days were bright with sunshine, and, as they passed through many picturesque villages, they frequently stopped at the various inns to quench their thirst with lemonade and ginger beer. Among the numerous shops they visited, they found plenty of variety in the way of food; it was the time of the year when asparagus, new potatoes and hothouse tomatoes were plentiful, and the fresh vegetables and fruit made a nice addition to their repasts. Both girls were excellent cooks, and they always cooked their dinner at night when they camped out, making a cold luncheon in the middle of the day.

Many a dainty dish was cooked on the ripping little stove and thoroughly appreciated. As they wandered through the country side, they never failed to look at any point of interest, such as churches and cathedrals and sometimes old ruins.

People for the most part were kind and civil, ready to give of their best for payment, and many pleasant conversations with both interesting and eccentric persons followed their enquiries as they went along.

One old man they met had a great deal to say about politics, and amused them very much with his remarks about the Government, Free Trade, and Tariff Reform. When pressed by the ladies to tell them which side he voted for, he looked very knowing, and winking one eye, explained :

"Wal ! yer see, it's this road, I'se an Inderpendent."

"And what is that?" enquired Milicent.

"Wal, miss, the trewth be, both sides is so tricky, I niver votes at all !"

Of course, this caused much merriment, and the little incident was stowed away to be repeated at future elections.

The days gradually became hotter and hotter, and the roads more and more dusty. One afternoon the atmosphere was so sultry that our caravaners anxiously looked about for a suitable place to camp in, though it was only 6 p.m., and they usually travelled much later. Passing by a large estate, they saw an empty field, which evidently belonged to the estate owners. It seemed a likely place, and Dora, thinking permission might be obtained from the lodge, undertook to interview the inhabitants. They referred her to the bailiff, who informed her that in the absence of the landlord, he thought he could permit them to remain in the field

for the night, and they could obtain water from the lodge. On Dora showing her card he became more communicative, and expressed his opinion that a heavy thunderstorm was brewing. "You keep right in the middle of the field away from the trees, ma'm," suggested the bailiff; "it's a pity the master is away, he might have allowed you into the courtyard."

"Oh! We don't mind, do we, Mops? And Bill can come inside the van if the storm should be very bad."

They were all thankful to find themselves on the grass, away from the dusty road, and did as the bailiff directed, placed the caravan as far from the trees as possible, near to the hedge which skirted the highway. They found a snug place for the tent, and the people at the lodge proved very kind, giving them milk, and telling the ladies if they were in any way alarmed to be sure and come to shelter with them.

Distant rumblings were heard soon after 6 p.m., and these continued all evening; but, though the sky was very dark and had a lurid look, no rain fell. The girls, with Billie, busied themselves making the van and tent safe against the coming storm. Daphne was strangely uneasy, and not inclined to settle for the night. Gipsy was most unconcerned, and never ceased nibbling grass from the time she entered the field. At 10 p.m. they all retired to rest. There were no stars, and the sky looked black and ominous; flashes of lightning appeared at intervals on the horizon. But this state of things did not prevent the tired girls from falling into a deep slumber.

About midnight they were aroused by a heavy clap of thunder which shook the van from end to end. Both girls jumped up and looked out of their

tiny windows. The whole field was ablaze with vivid lightning, and they could see the frightened horse galloping round in sheer terror. After a few claps of continuous thunder, down came the rain and hail, and the noise was so deafening they feared the caravan would be split in pieces.

"Poor Gipsy," murmured Milicent, "I'm sure she is terrified."

Daphne was growling and sniffing about.

"Are you afraid, Mops?" asked Dora.

"No, I think not. I suppose this van can stand a good deal," replied the girl.

"Yes, indeed. Jack and I have been inside here in some awful weather. I shall never forget a gale we had on the East coast; every moment I felt we were going to be blown over!"

"It won't matter as long as we can keep the rain out; but see," said Milly, "It's oozing under the door."

"We must put a towel. I wonder what Bill is doing. I hope he isn't wet."

"Let us open the window ever so little and shout to him." Dora seized the opportunity of a lull in the storm to put her head to the window and call: "Hello, Billie, are you all right?"

Not a sound came from the tent, and the rain trickled down like a water spout over the lad's sleeping place. "He is asleep. I wonder if the tent is quite waterproof? Here, Mops, you shout."

With her deep tones the girl managed to rouse the young man; in this she was aided by Daphne, who was now barking loudly.

"What d'ye want?" yelled Bill from his sleeping place.

"Are you dry, Bill," asked Dora, "and quite sheltered?"

"Yes, I'm all serene; storm's pretty bad. Are you both all right?"

"Yes," the girls answered, "we only wondered how you were faring. There goes another clap." After shutting the window, they both relapsed into silence for a short space. The thunder continued to roll, and the rain fell in torrents; the van was quite lit up with the vivid flashes. It was impossible to sleep.

"Let's make some tea," suggested Dora.

"A very good idea," added Mops.

And in a few minutes, with the aid of the spirit lamp, tea was brewed, and under its refreshing influence the girls chatted until the storm abated and the thunder became sufficiently distant for them to surrender themselves once more to sleep.

On waking the following morning, they were rewarded for their night's disturbance by a most delightful and fragrant atmosphere arising from the freshly watered earth; it had been so dry and parched the day before. The grass suddenly became a lovely green and the trees waved their refreshened leaves in the soft wind. Flowers opened and new buds cast sweet scents, pervading the whole country side. A strong smell of lavender now arose from the distant fields, where these blooms grew in great profusion for the purpose of manufacturing scent, and filled the air for several miles. Patches of golden gorse looked radiant in the now brilliant sunshine, and contrasted well against the hedges covered with the snowy hawthorn.

Living, as Milicent did, in a town, the whole scene was one of passing glory to her, and she feasted her eyes to her heart's content on the wealth of colour that adorned the earth and sky.

CHAPTER VI.

"And if I take you dames to task,
And say it frankly without guile,
Then you are gipsies in a mask,
And I the lady all the while."

"You doubt we read the stars on high,
Nathless, we read your fortunes true!
The stars may hide in the upper sky,
But without glass we fathom you."

—*Emerson.*

Our caravan party had now reached Cambridgeshire, and they found the country much flatter and not so picturesque as Hertfordshire. Many funny and startling remarks were passed on them as they strolled through the different villages and country towns.

On one occasion, as Dora and Milicent were occupied inside the van, it suddenly came to a standstill, and Bill appeared at the door, saying: "I can't get the horse to move for the crowd of country bumpkins collected in the road. They insist we are a party of Suffragettes, and are hooting and booing all the time. Gipsy evidently does not like it."

"Go to her head, Bill," shouted Dora, "and, Milly, do tell these people we have nothing to do with the Suffragettes!"

"What with Daphne barking, the children screaming and these people hooting, I don't suppose I can make myself heard," queried the girl. "Be

quiet, Daphne," she called to the dog as she appeared on the caravan steps, her hair down, and her poppy hat hastily thrown on to her head.

"My good people," she began, "we are not Suffragettes, neither have we the slightest sympathy with these misguided females or their methods, as they go up and down the country."

"Right you are, Miss," spoke a burly man with a good-natured face, "and it's a lady ye are, any bloke can see that."

"She's mair loike a real gipsy than onything else," cried an old woman, "and the chap as leads the oss is a proper tramp."

Dora now peeped out behind Mops, and, seeing how matters were, came forward and addressed the throng herself, trying to convince them they meant no harm, and were interfering with no one. She told them they were simply a party out for a holiday, and they had adopted this mode of travelling as a healthy one, giving them plenty of fresh air.

"It's a moighty quare way for gentlefolks to be going up and doon the counthry, ony way," muttered an Irishman who had come to England for the haymaking.

"Please, Miss, will ye tell me fortune," said a young girl, holding out her hand to Milicent.

"Your face is your fortune, pretty maid," said Billy, interrupting the young woman and flourishing his whip as he tried to drive off some urchins climbing up the wheels. He had hung a bag of food round Gipsy's neck to quieten her, and summoned a policeman who was watching the crowd, and very soon dismissed the rabble, who ended by cheering the caravaners as they dispersed.

"Good luck to ye. Begorrah, yer a bonnie turn out, the lot of you," shouted the Irishman as he lingered, evidently expecting something.

"Here's sixpence, Paddy," cried Mops, as she threw the coin, which the man caught in his apology for a cap. He was, of course, profuse in his blessings as he left the van, and the ladies were glad to be left in peace to continue their road.

"Won't Jack be amused," said Dora, "when we tell him. But doesn't it shew how hated these foolish women are wherever you go? I didn't know they went about in a caravan, though."

"I say, Billie," cried Mops, "that woman said you looked a proper tramp."

"Did she?" remarked the youth. "Well, it's worse to be called a gipsy, as you were, Mops." And so they chaffed as they wandered on, till they actually reached a real gipsy camp, settled on a common some distance out.

"Who was it that wrote, 'There is no one under thirty so dead but his heart will not go out to a gipsies' camp?'"

The question came from Dora, and Milicent remarked: "These Romaines always fascinate me; we have some named Boswell who visit us regularly every year in the North. Did you ever hear of their Patterain, Dora?"

"No," said Mrs. Sinclair, "what is it?"

"The gipsies usually leave some grass and flowers at the cross roads, to shew the way they have gone. E. Teschema has written a pretty piece of poetry about it:

"Where my caravan has rested,
Flowers I leave you on the grass;
All the flowers of love and memory,
You will find them, when you pass.

You will understand this message,
Stoop to kiss them as they lie;
But if other lips have found you,
Shed no tear and pass them by.'

As Mops finished she said : " Please let us stop. I do want to have my fortune told."

They immediately stopped, and drew their caravan on to the common they were traversing.

The camp consisted of two caravans, a dog cart, two horses and a pony. There appeared to be eight gipsies, including two children, an old couple with a married daughter and her husband, a young woman of twenty with her brother, both children of the old people. On enquiry, they found their name was Legh. All sat round a fire, over which hung a pot containing the family meal.

The girl, who was extremely handsome, rose and approached with dignity our caravaners, who advanced to meet her.

"I hope we are not disturbing you," asked Dora in a deferential tone, for it is impossible to come in contact with the real Romany and not be impressed with their haughty though subdued demeanour, also their innate refinement and gentleness of manner.

"Is there anything we can do for you?" enquired the girl, fixing them with her dark lustrous eyes.

" We should be grateful if you could tell us where we can procure water," answered the lady of the caravan.

" Certainly," and in a few words of Romany the girl addressed her brother, who very soon advanced with a large can, offering to shew Bill where the water could be fetched and to help him to carry what they required.

Milicent had drawn towards the fire, and entered into conversation with the old dame and her two grandchildren. The disturbance during their meal in no wise disconcerted these people. The old man relighted his pipe, whilst his eldest daughter rose and

offered her seat to Milicent. It was a wooden stool, and the mother had been feeding her two children as they stood beside her—such a bonnie brown-eyed, dark-skinned, curly-headed boy and girl. They soon scampered off to inspect the beautiful new caravan and gaily appareled cart horse.

Milicent was particularly struck with this young woman. Though not as handsome as her sister, she was very attractive, with her swarthy skin and eyes like sloes. As she smiled she shewed a brilliant set of teeth.

As soon as Milicent was seated the young woman asked: "Would the Missie like her fortune told?"

"Can you really tell me anything that is likely to happen?"

"I can read the stars," said the gipsy, "and I can read your face and the lines on your hand, lady, if you will but cross my palm with some silver."

Milicent produced a shilling, which the gipsy took, and after crossing the girl's hand with it she placed it inside her dress. She wore a fantastic kerchief around her head, long earrings dropped from her well-shaped ears, and a scarlet shawl enveloped her shoulders and well-formed bust.

As Milly's pink little hand lay in the long, thin, swarthy palm of the fortune teller she began in a droning hurried manner to utter these words: "You've seen trouble, more's to come; never break your heart over the dark man that's far away over the seas; he's been none so true, honey. There's another, but he has only crossed your path once yet; he'll worship the ground you tread on, but your tongue is saucy and sharp. Beware of using it over much. Watch a fair woman; she's mighty jealous on you, and so are others. Keep a wise

head ; you've many friends, one not so far off ; she's lucky to ye. There's a strange bed, company, laughter, merriment, much joy at the finish of this journey. Keep your counsel, and you'll come to no harm. Have a care of the water, and them that's to do with it. You'll live to carry your stick in your hand, overcome all your troubles— "

"Shall I be married ?" enquired Mops.

"That rests with yourself. Maybe you'll say 'yes,' and maybe you'll say 'no.' Be sure you choose the right one, and all will be well."

"Thank you," said the girl in a depressed tone ; "it all sounds rather indefinite," and she sighed as she spoke.

In the meantime Dora was having her fortune told by the old dame ; they had retired to some distance and appeared very confidential. Dora had slipped off her wedding ring, but it was not possible to deceive the old gipsy, who immediately said :

"Lady, ye can't deceive me ; you've married one as is good and true to you, though a bit hasty in temper. You've had, and still have, many admirers, but you can keep 'em at a distance. You'll get a legacy before long. You're fretting a bit, maybe it's because you've no childer, but you'll have two soon, one of each sex. You've many friends, one as is close, too ; she'll bring you good luck at the *hint of this journey. I see one or two accidents ; beware of the water and four-footed beasts ! There's company, merry-making ; a journey by train later, none so pleasant, brings disappointment. You'll live to dandle grand-children on your knee. You're plucky and generous ; keep a good heart. You're not born to be very rich."

*A gipsy expression.

As she ended Dora put half-a-crown into her hand, and turned towards Milly, who was hastening towards her. After exchanging confidences relating to what the gipsies foretold, they agreed to cook their dinner, as they were likely to be very late if they remained on the common as they wished to do, the gipsies having invited them to inspect their caravans. Having consumed a hastily prepared meal they rejoined the Romanys, who were full of interesting anecdotes concerning the wandering life they led. The old couple occupied one van, while the two sisters and two children slept in the other. The two men shared a tent of their own making.

It is perfectly marvellous what these gipsies manage to stow away in their commodious cars. Valuable articles were exhibited to the ladies, which consisted of old jewellery, silver, brasses, copper and old china.

Some of these articles they prize very highly, and it is a strange fact, though possessed of articles which would fetch at once ready money, they do not always hesitate, when necessity involves it, to steal food, in the shape of game and poultry, as well as fruit and vegetables. Last, but not least, they displayed with great pride the yellow satin dress which every Romany woman thinks is lucky to be married in.

Their superstitious nature leads them to acquire many useless articles, but all have the same care, and are prized from descendant to descendant. Their clever fingers are not often idle. Many mats, baskets, clothes pegs, and even beautiful lace, have been made by these ingenious people.

On Dora's invitation to inspect her caravan, they all eagerly pressed forward, the stove exciting the keenest interest, and Daphne was much admired by

the old man, who possessed a very good knowledge of dogs generally.

"Bill, I don't believe you've had your fortune told," exclaimed Mops, as she saw him lying on the grass, smoking in a dreamy fashion.

"No one has offered to tell me," he said, as he glanced towards the beautiful girl, who had scarcely spoken to any of the party during their long interview.

"I am sure Judith will tell you, sir," said the old dame. "Just cross her hand with silver and she will relate what the stars predict for ye."

Judith advanced, looking shyly at Bill from her lovely eyes and drooping eyelashes.

He rose lazily and allowed her to take his hand. She then repeated in a soft cooing tone: "You are alone in the world; you take things easily. Your troubles do not make deep impression on you. You have friends who are good to you, but you will leave the country before long, and sail West. You will do well, and make your home over the sea. A dark girl crosses your path, and will try to marry you; she is older, but will make a good wife. I see a severe illness, and this woman will nurse you. Beware of a red-haired man, have no dealings with him, he will try to rob you. Success can only come to you through perseverance. You've a happy-go-lucky nature. Don't depend too much on others, take your own road."

As Judith ceased, there was a dead silence. Her voice and speech were both refined and educated. It transpired, on enquiry, that the girl had not always dwelt in camp, but had been sent to school by a wealthy relative. She could, however, never stand the confinement of a house, and restraint necessary to her surroundings. Her health became delicate, and she was glad to return to her simple and

wandering life with her family. Before they left she sang and accompanied herself on the violin.

Dora and Milicent very reluctantly bid the gipsies goodbye, for they had spent a most original and enjoyable time. And, as they rolled along the common, Milly sang, sitting on the box seat, to an air of Schubert :

"Wealth, I ask not, hope or love,
Nor a friend to know me ;
All I ask, the Heaven above
And the road below me."

—*R. L. Stevenson.*

CHAPTER VII.

"The sky was bright, the river ran
And murmured by our caravan.
The heavens by the moon was lit
Whilst those within the van did sit.
Cathedral towers rose in the west;
We, gazing, weary, fell to rest."

—*B. E. F.*

June had brought very warm weather, and our caravaners found the Cambridgeshire roads flat and dusty.

They agreed to make straight for the North, stopping near March, a small town in the N. Litchford district. On their arrival, Dora found a letter from Jack, saying he intended to take a short holiday, and bring Mrs. Loftus to Ely, where he expected them to meet him on a given date. So after remaining near March one night, and making some purchases in its excellent market, they wended their way South, passing through St. Ives, a pretty town and parish in Huntingdonshire. It is situated on the river Ouse, and the place is sometimes subject to floodings from this river, over which hangs a bridge said to have been erected by the Abbots of Ramsey. Over one of its piers there is an ancient building, which had been originally a chapel, but is now used as a public house. They spent the night

on the outskirts of this pretty place, then took the road for Ely, arriving in time to meet Jack and Mrs. Loftus.

As Dora and Milicent emerged from the van and skipped into the station, many a face was turned to look at their sunburnt faces and bright costumes. Further interest was excited by the caravan and Bill in his eccentric get-up.

Daphne sniffed about, evidently expecting someone, and as the train drew into the station, had a narrow escape of being killed, so anxious was she to reach her master, whom she saw leaning out of the window, but Milly averted the catastrophe by seizing the dog in her arms. It was a happy meeting, and they soon arranged for Milicent to accompany Mrs. Loftus to the hotel, whilst Jack joined his wife in the caravan. Billy was to return home by train, the young man nothing loth to give up his wandering life, to return to Woodfield.

The young couple sought and soon found a suitable spot outside Ely, close to the river Ouse, where numberless willows shed a pleasant shade on the banks. These trees are peculiar to this marshy district, and gave a quaint effect to the surrounding country.

From their camping place they had a perfect view of the grand cathedral, one of the oldest and most interesting in England. From the busy hands of the Normans arose the wondrous pile of St. Ethelreda, called the "Monarch of the Fens." The structure is built of massive work, and the transepts are magnificent. This cathedral is said to have been erected by Simeon, brother to Bishop Walkeln of Winchester, who was one of William the Conqueror's first bishops. It is a vast building, and contains a variety of shape. By many persons it is thought to surpass all other cathedrals in the

kingdom, but it certainly has lost much of its original character, though as an edifice it is strikingly beautiful. Peterborough, the great Mercian Abbey, also remains to us a monument of splendid Norman work.

Jack and Dora were delighted to be together again in their beloved caravan. The scenery, though flat, was fertile, and their camping place, on the banks of the river, far from noise and disturbing influences. Before them rose in stately grandeur the glorious cathedral, and they were reminded of Shelley's beautiful lines :

> "Within the surface of the fleeting river
> The wrinkled image of the City lay,
> Immoveably unquiet, and forever
> It trembles, but it never fades away."

On arriving, Jack hired a punt, and they both spent many quiet hours on the river.

One afternoon, as Jack was lying in it reading, he heard a scream and a splash, and beheld a little girl on the opposite side, wringing her hands, and making desperate attempts to reach the water, close to a spot where he saw large circles forming. Another small urchin stood yelling loudly beside an overturned perambulator, caught in a thicket.

Jack divined the situation at once, pulled off his coat and boots, and was soon swimming to the fatal spot. He called to the little girl to mind her brother, and she in her turn shrieked out : "Oh, sir ! Baby, baby. She's drownded ; she falled out of the pram, and I can't see her anywhere."

Jack immediately dived down to the place she indicated, and on rising held in his arms a small bundle, which he swam with towards their own camping place.

Dora, who was dressing to go and join her

mother and Mops, heard the screams, with the barking of Daphne. She flew at once to the river side, just in time to receive the poor little rescued infant from the arms of her husband. He advised her to put the wee mite at once into blankets in the van, and said he would be back in a twinkling. Plunging in once more, he swam to the assistance of the two children on the bank and extricated them from their dangerous position. After sending the little girl for her mother, he returned to find his wife, who had quite undressed the baby, placing it in her eider-down quilt. She gave him a look as he arrived, whispering she feared the infant had breathed its last.

Without changing his wet garments, Jack proceeded to use every means in his power, and all the methods he knew of to bring the child to life, but it was of no avail; the already delicate infant had succumbed to the severe shock and soaking.

Tears stood in Dora's eyes as she thought of the poor mother, but on beholding her husband shivering, she exclaimed: "Take off those wet things at once, Jack. Get into these blankets on Milly's shakedown." He did at once as she suggested, and after rubbing himself dry he lay in the deck chair warmly covered up, sipping whiskey, which they fortunately had in the small cupboard.

Before long Milicent appeared to make enquiries as to why Dora had not turned up as expected. With a very white face Mrs. Sinclair explained how matters were, and suggested that as soon as Jack could get into dry garments he should go back with Mops to the hotel.

Long ere they were ready to start the sad news had spread; kind women arrived with warm blankets and hot-water, whilst one thoughtfully lit a fire just outside the caravan. It seemed a long

time to Dora before the mother came, and on her arrival she was in such a distracted condition that they found difficulty in breaking the distressing news to the poor woman, who, as soon as she heard it, swooned away !

Dora felt it was impossible to leave the scene of the accident at present, but hurried her husband and friend to the hotel to find assistance.

Meanwhile the news had created much excitement in Ely, and it was currently reported that Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair's child had been drowned, but before the sun set the truth became known, and the distressed young mother was receiving help and sympathy from many a quarter, so grieved were they to learn of the tragic loss of her little one.

The landlord of the hotel, when he heard of the accident and Mr. Sinclair's prompt bravery and action in the matter, did all he could to persuade him to send for his caravan and cart-horse in order to put it up in his yard. Mrs. Loftus insisted on fetching Dora, and keeping them both at the hotel for a couple of days. Considering Jack was subject to rheumatic attacks, and that the scene of the catastrophe must be very painful to the caravaners, it was the wisest thing to submit to these arrangements ; and, refraining from any regrets, our young couple soon made themselves quite happy at the hotel and began to make plans for their further prospective journey by caravan.

In spite of Mrs. Loftus and her protestations, Dora and Milly declared they were quite capable of proceeding alone without Billy on their tour.

" It will be one less to cook for," remarked Dora. " Besides, he requires so much prodding and looking after."

" But what about the horse ? " remonstrated her mother.

"Oh, we can manage Gipsy," cried Mops, decidedly. "Dora and I often groom the horses at Woodfield, Grannie."

"But, my dear Mops, you could not possibly reach the beast's neck to put its collar on," laughed Jack.

"Well; can't I get on a stool," quickly retorted the girl.

"I see," muttered the young man, "it is quite evident you two girls are bent on mischief. What it is I can't fathom."

"It's really very improper and quite out of the question," murmured the old lady.

"Indeed, mother dear, you forget I am a married woman, quite capable of chaperoning Milicent and looking after the van."

"You're nothing but a child still, Dora, and I repeat it is highly immoral."

At this juncture Dora winked at Mops, and she winked back again with suppressed laughter. Jack poured oil on the troubled waters by proposing to take another few days, and enquired of his wife whether she would like to start the Monday evening on their much-talked-of moonlight trip. "I can accompany you as far as Hitchin," he added, "and Falstaff could meet you there, and escort you to his bungalow, where you could put up in his meadow. Then Whelpton might help you home again."

"What a brick you are, Jack," screamed Mops. "The very thing; just what we've been wishing for, a moonlight flit, isn't it, Dora? A real tramp by starlight down the country side." And Milly danced round the room a *pas seul*.

The matter was now settled to the satisfaction of all parties, and Mrs. Loftus, entirely satisfied, made her departure for home the following morning.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Stars that bringest home the bee,
And set the weary labourer free;
Stars that light the summer skies,
Whilst the pallid moon doth rise;
Stars that are the traveller's friend,
Guide us to our journey's end."

The country round Ely is so flat that as our caravan moved slowly on the high road outside the town, it gave them the opportunity of studying the stars in the immense horizon which surrounded them. The moon had not yet risen, and Dora had insisted on having the van decorated with Chinese lanterns. She placed a red shade over the lamp inside and another over the one hanging above the box seat, where she and Mops sat enveloped in their ulsters and white motor veils. The plants outside had been renovated, and the caravan presented an attractive and unique appearance.

"I wish we had an electric light for Gipsy's head; that would complete the striking effect," said Milly.

"So it would, if it was a green one to match the lamps in front which light the road."

Daphne was not to be persuaded to turn night into day, and she lay curled up on a cushion inside the van, fast asleep.

As they went along, Milly sang and they all laughed and munched chocolate at intervals. Jack smoked as he walked and sat on the van's steps alternately.

They were now *en route* for Bedford, having decided not to visit the University town on this occasion ; but as they passed several villages during the night, the noise of the van startled not a few of the inhabitants. Some arose and peeped from under their blinds, much surprised to witness the brilliantly lighted equipage. Questions were asked as to who they were and where they were going. One old woman enquired if they were members of the Salvation Army, and wanted to throw them some coppers.

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to put on the bonnet," said Dora, "distribute some tracts and collect money for charity."

"I should strongly object to the bonnets," replied Jack, "though I should not mind beating the big drum. Such eccentric costumes and a brass instrument always excite sympathy. These people, I believe, collect piles of money, and no doubt do an immense amount of good. What do you say to some hot toddy, girls, or tea if you prefer it? After that, you two can go to sleep and I shall drive."

"Getting tired, old boy?" enquired Dora of her husband. "The hot whiskey is a ripping idea, but the leaving you to drive is another matter, especially after the whiskey."

"I should think so," echoed Milly. "You would end by falling asleep, rolling off into the road, and dropping the reins. Gipsy would soon be nibbling grass under the hedges. What would happen then?"

"He'd get run over, of course, and we should have to turn this into an ambulance, and goodness knows where we should be. No, no, laddie, we must either continue as we have done, or strike a rest by the road side, till we are forcibly moved on. I intend to keep my weather eye open."

It was now 4 a.m. and fast becoming light, when

Gipsy, apparently tired, refused to go any further; so they dragged her near a gate, gave her something to eat in her bag, and the rest of the water they carried, which was not much.

Then the two girls settled on their chairs and dozed for a couple of hours, whilst Jack, who made himself comfortable on the box seat, was soon fast asleep.

At 7 a.m., they hastily rose and prepared to enter the country town of C——, which was not far off. On arriving Jack set about making enquiries as to the precise distance to Bedford. Having done this, and procuring information about the district, he suggested that the mare should be stabled for a couple of hours, whilst they partook of breakfast at the inn.

The girls, feeling pretty stiff and declaring a night's trip was not all *couleur de rose*, gratefully accepted Jack's proposition and were soon enjoying a good hot cup of coffee, with a dish of ham and eggs.

As Jack went out to re-harness Gipsy, he interviewed the landlady, who told him she had a sister married to a farmer a couple of miles away, and she felt sure they would allow the caravan to go into a field belonging to them, and it was situated close to a plantation and stream; then she kindly gave him a note of introduction. After thanking her, he hurried the girls on to the van, and soon reached the place recommended, finding it charming.

"What an ideal spot to rest in," said both girls, as they passed through the gate into the plantation.

Jack discovered plenty of room in a corner covered with grass, where he could dispose of the van on the high road close to the wood, and from which the girls could see it as they rested on the mossy mound inside. Gipsy he turned into the field.

"Here we can repose in peace. Go and fetch

some rugs and cushions, Milly, and tell Jack we are all right."

The girl rushed off and returned laden with paraphernalia, which they arranged, and were soon comfortably reclining under the shade of the pine trees which formed the plantation.

Milly could not help quoting some of Whittier's words as she settled herself:

> "Here is the place right under the trees,
> Close to the murmuring brook.
> The shade of the pines can shelter us till
> We are forced to leave this sweet nook."

"Hello," shouted Jack. "Well, I'm blowed, you are in a hurry to snooze. What about lunch?"

"Oh, bother lunch," said his wife. "You must ferret for yourself. Mops and I don't want any."

"By jove," said her husband, "we'll have to dine though, before we start for Bedford; it's the dickens of a way."

"And this reminds me, we've nothing to cook for dinner. How stupid! I meant to get something in C———"

"Never mind. I'll go and get some food, and you can prepare it later on, whilst I take a tub and a doze. The old mare is all right, and I've closed the caravan door. Bye-bye! Pleasant dreams!"

Before you could say "Jack Robinson" slowly, the girls were both asleep, Daphne crouched beside them.

Jack strode off whistling to make his purchases. But what was his astonishment on his return to find Daphne barking loudly, a man and woman seated on the steps of the van, and two cycles hitched up against the wheel. The couple were watching his wife and Milicent with an amused expression; both were evidently still in the arms of Morpheus.

The man rose at once, saying : "I hope we are not intruding, sir, but I was glad to find my wife a seat on these steps. You see the dog is protesting loudly. Nothing short of an earthquake would appear to waken these ladies, whom, I surmise, belong to this van."

"Lucky I shut the doors," thought Jack ; "one never knows, but this chap seems all right." Nevertheless he remained silent, gazing keenly into the speaker's eyes.

The man was clean-shaven, with a shock of red hair ; his blue eyes smiled merrily, but, on receiving no answer from the surprised Jack, he addressed the young woman : "Have you nearly finished, Lucy ? We must be moving on if we are to be in time to catch our train to London from Bedford." Then, turning to Jack, he explained: "We have been a cycling tour, and our holiday is over."

"Oh, indeed ! " uttered Jack.

"What a delightful time you must be having with this splendid caravan, and such weather, too," continued he.

"Rather slow," repeated Jack, "a motor would be better."

The girl on the step, munching a chicken bone, now looked up, saying in a pert tone : "Motoring aint a very safe way of travelling, and motors are perfectly disgusting and dangerous to cyclists." She was a striking-looking woman, dark and bright coloured, decidedly wanting in refinement.

"Do let's be going, Lucy," continued her companion, who felt his room would be much preferred to his company.

"Don't hurry yourself," spoke Jack Sinclair, sarcastically. He was inwardly chafing at the intrusion.

"I thought any seat was public property on the 'igh road," said she, throwing away her chicken

bone. "You only said a minute since, Charlie, as there was plenty of time." This was all uttered in a nasal, unpleasant Cockney voice.

Daphne had now effectually aroused her mistress by tugging at her skirt, and Dora, hearing strange voices, woke up Milicent. On looking round, they were relieved to see Jack close to them.

As the ladies approached the van, the young woman reluctantly gave up her seat, for Mops, in a most dignified tone, said: "Please allow us to pass into *our* caravan."

Charley, thoroughly discomfited, speedily got on his bicycle, ordering Lucy to do the same. The young woman gave a haughty toss of her head, and very slowly obeyed him, and he, raising his hat, soon was in full swing. As they both disappeared from view an angry altercation evidently took place, for their voices were raised so as to be distinctly heard.

"I don't like the look of that woman," said Jack, "and I am doubtful if she is that fellow's wife. How sordid and unpleasant vulgar people can make an encounter even in these delightful surroundings. It was incautious of you both to sleep so soundly and so long. Had I left the doors open, these people might have robbed the van and scampered off. What about that weather eye of yours, Dora?"

"Let us cook our dinner, and you go to sleep, you crosspatch. What have you brought?"

"Look!" And her husband handed her the parcel. "I am off for some water to get a tub inside the van, after which I'll take a smoke and siesta, with your permission, ladies."

"With all the pleasure in life," sang Dora, as she undid the parcel. "Why, here's a chicken, ready dressed, too; tomatoes, onions, and a bunch of beautiful asparagus."

"Where's the bread? Here, behind you. He has done well," said Milly.

The stove was in first-rate order, and an excellent meal was not long in preparing.

Milly set a clean cloth on the grassy mound, in the wood, and all was daintily spread when Jack emerged from the van, crying: "What a delicious smell of roast chicken!" He very soon fell to carving it, and with the addition of new potatoes, tomatoes and bread sauce, washed down by a bottle of claret, the meal was acceptable indeed. The asparagus was cooked to perfection, not even the melted butter was forgotten.

"We'll never enjoy our dinner under a roof again," they all agreed.

Daphne wagged her tail, and caught the bones thrown to her.

"How on earth you never heard that dog bark passes my comprehension," began Jack once more.

"Oh, do shut up," replied his wife, "will you never let that episode alone, old boy?"

"Well, candidly, I don't think you are either of you fit to carry on this caravan business alone."

"Really, Jack, if you keep on like that, you'll have Dora reduced to tears," cried Mops; "it's horridly mean of you."

"Don't mind, Dodo, old girl. I think I am bilious, and must vent my spleen on some one; we are all a bit tired. Wait till we get to Bedford and I'll treat you each to a bottle of fizz."

Dora soon brightened up at this, and smiling on her husband, asked him to harness Gipsy at once to the van, and said it was time to be making tracks for their journey. "We can get these plates and pans washed up when we reach Bedford." And they hastily packed them away as they were.

CHAPTER IX.

"The western road was open to the sky.
There now the sun had sunk, but lines of gold
Hung on the ashen clouds, and on the points
Of the far level grass, and nodding flower,
And the old dandelion's hoary head,
And, mingling with the shades of twilight, fell
On the brown, mossy woods."

—*Shelley.*

For some distance both girls walked and Jack drove, but after three miles tramp they entered the van to straighten their hair, taking a wash and changing their blouses and shoes. Jack turned some literature out of his pocket for them, and as they sat in their deck chairs they read and crocheted in turns.

"It's much jollier with Jack than Billie," Mops ventured to say, "he is so considerate and thoughtful."

"Oh, yes, when he doesn't tease."

"That's only his fun?"

"At my expense," said Dora.

"Let bygones be bygones." And Milly started humming.

"What's that I hear about bygones?" asked Jack, as he put his head round the door.

"Never you mind," laughed Dora. "Keep your ugly mug outside."

"You are very polite, mistress mine," said Jack, smiling. "Here, I want you two girls to come and look at the sunset."

Out they bounded on the high road, and a most glorious sunset presented itself to their view.

The van was rolling along a common, covered at intervals with patches of gorse. A few wild roses were seen peeping through brushwood and bushes, white ones, such as grow on open ground. The grass was full of wild flowers of various kinds ; there were few hedges, and only a tree or two here and there.

In the distance some hills were to be seen rising on the borders of Hertfordshire, tinted with a pale lavender. Away to the west lay an open tract of country, traversed with silvery lines of canals and streams.

The scene lay bathed in the golden rays of a setting sun. Overhead, filmy clouds edged with pink floated through an azure sky, and the evening star began to shew itself above the sun, which gradually changed into a fiery ball. As it neared its sinking point, lines of ashen clouds shot out on either side, assuming fantastic shapes and striking out into a rapidly rising mist.

"This means a piping hot day to-morrow," remarked Dora.

"I'm not so sure, little woman ; I see indications of a change ; the barometer inside the van is falling slightly."

"For wind, probably," spoke Mops ; "and I hate a wind. Fancy this caravan in a gale."

"But we don't have gales in June."

"I am afraid we do, Dora. One of the worst gales I ever remember was off the west coast in Ireland, in the month of July. Oh my, how it blew and pelted," said Jack.

"Well, this has been an exceptional spring, and I am going to trust to our continual good fortune until we reach home."

They were now descending a gradual incline, which led on to the high road to Bedford. Numerous stars became visible, but there was no moon to be seen. It was getting late, and the party pleaded hunger as an excuse for stopping.

"It doesn't look like fizz to-night," said Jack, laughing; and after they had made a scratch meal, he declared his intention of camping out at the next most convenient place. They travelled on for another mile or so, and then sighted a farm, which they reached only just in time to get permission from the farmer, who was retiring to rest, to take their van into a field, where hay already lay in cocks.

"This is jolly," they remarked, "such a sweet smell of hay."

It was in fact one of the nicest spots they had camped in in the way of a field, certainly as far as shelter went. The van was drawn up alongside a half-finished hayrick, which kept away the rising wind; clouds were scudding overhead, and before they settled, heavy rain drops began to fall, but what cared our caravaners? Thoroughly tired out, they fell asleep, snug as bugs in rugs; and they readily slept the sleep of the just.

It was disappointing, on rising, to find the fields wet with the rain which had fallen during the night. Things looked pretty damp. While they were dressing a timid knock came to the door, and on Milly opening it, a little girl of sixteen appeared, asking if she could get them some milk.

"Oh, thank you," smiled Dora Sinclair, "please bring a quart and some eggs and butter, if you have any."

"Yes, miss," and the girl ran off, returning

almost immediately with eggs, milk and butter, and in addition some scones and marmalade.

"If you please, miss, mother said I was to ask if you would like me to wash up later!"

"Certainly," said Mrs. Sinclair, smiling at being again addressed as "miss." "That is just what we want, someone to help with last night's dishes."

"And can I bring a can of hot water with me? Mother says it will be very handy."

"We're in luck's way, notwithstanding the damp," remarked Mops. "That's a deft and bright little damsel. Shall I call Jack?"

"No! He'll soon hear us moving, and I want to tidy up the van before he comes, as it is too damp to sit outside for our breakfast."

Hot water for tea was soon boiling on the spirit lamp, with the eggs inside to save time. Bedding disappeared, night garments were placed out of sight, and after putting a clean cloth on the table, Mops opened the door to get the cups; as she did so Jack appeared, enquiring where he was to breakfast in the rain.

"In here, of course," answered the girl; "make haste, we are quite prepared."

"By gad, you are cosy," remarked the gentleman, as he sat on the box. "Poor old Gipsy looks rather forlorn under the tree, doesn't she?"

"You must give her some corn when you have finished!"

"I shall have to get it at the farm, then, for ours is done."

"Well, make haste, and hurry up the little girl with the hot water."

"All right," and off Jack went to the farmhouse, returning later with the girl, whom he said was named Jenny.

"Dora," asked Jack, "one of the sons wants to

take a photo of the car with us. Have you any objection?"

"No, of course not. Let him come right away. It is clearing up; see, the sun is trying to shine on us."

A tall, lanky young fellow soon arrived with his camera, and a very fine one it was, too. After focusing the party, he said: "If this copy turns out satisfactory, I'll send you one, sir, if you will give me your name and address."

Jack scribbled it on a leaf in his pocket-book and handed it him.

"That's a bonny mare of yours," said the youth. "I suppose she is not for sale when you've done this journey."

"No, indeed," eagerly replied the two girls. "We wouldn't part with Gipsy for all the gold in the world."

"Good morning, ladies. I hope you'll have a pleasant journey," said the young fellow, as he left them.

"Please, mum," asked a young woman, carrying a pail for milk, "Missus would like to see you up at the farm afore you leave."

"Very well, we shall pop round as soon as we are ready." And on reaching the farm, they were met by a fine buxom woman, holding an infant in her arms. She had a pleasant face, and after bidding them welcome, offered each of the girls an exquisite bunch of June roses. Of course they were charmed with the attention, and thanked the woman heartily, kissing and admiring the baby, a sweet healthy-looking little one.

They then followed the caravan, which was fast wending its way to Bedford. When they reached it, Jack told them he had heard of a capital place to camp in for the night.

"Oh, I hope it's country," exclaimed Dora.

"I'm told it is a field belonging to a celebrated nursery gardener, quite the other side of Bedford, and that besides his own house and gardens there are only a few scattered cottages in the vicinity."

They walked for some distance, and after skirting the town soon discovered their destination on the South-east side of Bedford, and from which they could take the direct road to Hitchin the following day.

The gardener's house was a pretty modern building, and at the side and back were established some spacious tea gardens ; these held a pergola and an aviary, and were full of flowers of every description.

The arches which formed the pergola were covered with Crimson Ramblers and Dorothy Perkins roses. From the festoons hung baskets filled with mignonette and pink geraniums, also lobelias.

The wide beds underneath contained enormous and beautiful pansies in every variety, and as Milicent bent down to examine them, she asked Dora if she had ever noticed how nearly many of these flowers resembled human faces. "I know a lady," she said, "who declared to me she could almost hear herself conversing with many of her friends, as one by one their sweet blooms revealed themselves to her."

"What a singular idea," remarked Dora. "It is one that never occurred to me. Look, Milly ! Did you ever behold anything so dainty as this set out ?"

She alluded to the many little tables arranged on the green sward inside the pergola. They were covered with lacy-looking cloths, delicate china and bowls of lovely flowers ; rustic seats invited you to sit down in this charming spot and partake of the excellent tea and cream prepared in a small kitchen

close by, entirely hidden by creepers and boxes of flowers.

Through a gap in the hedge the girls could see the extensive nurseries filled with large patches of irises, delphiniums, phlox, forget-me-nots and sweet peas. A few long low glass houses scintillated in the sunshine, and they also doubtless contained numerous nurslings ready to plant out when required. The air itself was impregnated with the delicious scent of living blossoms.

Mr. Newman, the gardener, gave the Sinclairs immediate permission to land the caravan in his field adjoining the nursery garden. Gipsy was soon led through the wide gate,at once unharnessed, and left to go free. As soon as they finished their luncheon, Jack suggested locking the van and all three setting off for the town, as he had to call for letters. "You can then both do your shopping."

"How far is it?" enquired Dora.

"About twenty minutes' walk, so make haste and titivate yourselves, as we may very likely meet some one we know."

They were not long adorning themselves, and Dora appeared very quickly in a fresh gown of green cotton and her large hat trimmed with elder flowers and green leaves; it suited her admirably, and she looked cool and delightful.

Milicent wore a pale blue cotton trimmed with Turkey red, and her Leghorn hat covered with scarlet poppies. She appeared more like a gipsy than ever, and Jack felt very proud of the two girls as he led them into the town, leaving them near the principal shops, to find his way to the post-office.

CHAPTER X.

"Two tiny pairs of arms, as white as snow,
Held me in soft embrace;
Their little cheeks, like velvet peaches soft,
Were placed against my face.

Two pretty pairs of eyes, so soft and brown,
Gazed up into mine own;
Two rosy pairs of lips whispered 'Good-night,'
And changed my heart of stone."

—*Anon.*

After walking up and down, and purchasing what they required, they both stopped before a curio shop window admiring the fascinating articles arranged in front of the large plate glass. As they were singling out some pewter, a child's voice close to them was heard to say: "Oh, muvver! Did oo ever see such a long dawg?"

Someone replied: "Don't touch it, Nancy; perhaps the dog doesn't like little girls."

"Oh, but it does, mummie; it's smelling my booties."

Dora turned round to call Daphne, for she felt sure hers was the dog alluded to, and she began to whistle for her.

In a moment, the lady's voice was heard exclaiming: "Why, Dora, is that you? What a delightful surprise." And the pretty woman seized Dora's hand, and gave her a hearty shake.

"Beatrice, where on earth have you dropped from?"

"I live in Bedford ; my husband has a practice here," said Mrs. Gray. "Come, let me shew you my little twins, aged five. Here, Betty and Nancy, speak to Mrs. Sinclair."

"What sweet darlings," observed Mops, and she came forward, addressing Mrs. Gray : "I think we've met before, have we not?"

"Why, of course, it is Milicent Foster. How are you?" said the lady. "Staying with Dora, I suppose."

"I am. Do you remember what fun we had at the Horse Show two years ago? And these are your twin girlies that I heard so much about."

The little mites looked very quaint in their yellow Dutch bonnets and pelisses of the same colour. They had both brown eyes, auburn curls, button noses, and smiling red lips. They resembled one another very nearly, but on a second glance the elder's face seemed much graver and more thoughtful than the younger.

"This is Betty," said the mother as she drew the elder child towards her, and that is Nancy—mischievous Nancy, her father calls her ; she is never still a moment." Nancy's expression was certainly more piquante than her sister's, and there was more alertness in her eye. She was at that moment trying to pull long-suffering Daphne's tail, still calling her "a velly ugly long dawg." "And her ears lops too much, and her body's too low down," repeated the child.

"Come away, you tiresome little thing," said her mother, as she dragged her away from the dog.

"Daphne is not used to children," said Milicent. "You had better not touch her, dear."

"Is it oos dawg?" asked Betty in a subdued little voice, looking at Milicent.

"No, she belongs to Mrs. Sinclair and has travelled with us a long way in the caravan."

"What's dat?" asked Betty, opening her eyes.

"Why, it's a cally man, of tourse," explained Nancy. Looking up to Milicent, she added: "Isn't it, Miss—Miss—?"

"Miss Mops," suggested Milly.

"Mops, dat's what Annie cleans de yard vid, isn't it, mammie?"

"As usual, Nancy, you've far too much to say. Little girls should be seen and not heard."

"Not heard," repeated the child, and she ran to take Milly's disengaged hand; Betty had possession of the other.

Dora and Beatrice becoming much engrossed in one another's conversations, Milicent led the twins to a toy shop close by, and amused herself with their remarks.

"Has oo dot a teddy bear?" asked Betty.

"No, but I have a live doggie I love dearly."

"What's it talled?" piped Nancy.

"Jill," answered Mops, and before she could say another word off the twins started to sing the old nursery rhyme of "Jack and Jill" in such sweet voices that passers-by stopped to listen.

"And dat's all," they exclaimed when they had finished.

"Have oo dot a Jack as well as a Jill?" asked Betty again.

"Yes!" laughed the girl "and here he comes!"

"Why, what have we got here?" cried Jack as he approached the party. "Two little daffodils, I declare; these are the twins, of course," he said, turning to Mrs. Gray.

He picked up Betty in his arms to kiss her, but as he did so she muttered:

"Put me down, pease; nana says we mustn't tiss men in de steets."

They all laughed at the demure little maid, who looked more solemn than ever.

"Miss Mops says oos de udder dawg," shouted Nancy.

"What?" shrieked Jack; "Mops says I'm a dog? Well I'm blowed."

"Can oo blow bubbles" asked the irrepressible little one.

"I really must take this chatter-box away," said her mother, and beckoned for the nurse, who now appeared on the scene.

"Oh, please don't send them off," pleaded Mops. "Dora, may we not take them to tea with us in the caravan?"

"We should be delighted. Do, Beatrice, let us have the darlings for a while."

"Do you really mean it?" said Mrs. Gray.

"Of course I do."

"And we shall take such care of them," said Milicent.

"Will you be good without nana?" asked the mother.

"We will boff be dood for a bit, and nana come and fetch us," answered Nancy.

"I'll call for them in the motor at 6 o'clock," said Mrs. Gray. Where did you say the caravan was?"

"Newman's Nursery Gardens."

"I wonder if they can walk as far."

"Oh, I'll carry them in turns," called Jack, and he ran off with Nancy on his shoulder.

Dora and Milicent took Betty between them and started off for the caravan.

"I'm sorry I shall have to leave you both," said Jack. "Grannie has written to say I'm wanted, so I am starting by the 6-10 train."

"Oh, what a pity!" sighed his wife.

"It's an awful nuisance!" echoed Mops.

"A norful noosance," copied Nancy.

She received a good smacking kiss for this speech.

"The worst is, you will have to get to Hitchin alone. I have sent a card to Dick Bouverie to meet you and get a camping place for you."

"Now don't worry about us, old boy. We shall be all right," said his wife. "Ladies often get on much better without the men!"

"You are not flattering," he remarked, as he changed Nancy for Betty on his shoulder.

As they reached the caravan, growls of thunder were heard in the distance.

"I hope we are not going to have another storm. Are you afraid of thunder?" asked Milly of the children.

"Oh, no," said Betty; "muvver says it's only God clearing away de eliphants!"

"Elements, you mean," laughed Jack. "Well, you are the queerest little mortals I ever struck."

"You never struck us," lisped Nancy. "I love oo velly much, Mr. Jack"; and saying this, she scampered off with her sister round the field in great delight, and were much interested in Gipsy, who gazed at them with her soft eyes in a lazy, condescending manner.

"Can she be catched when she daws the red cart?"

"I hope so, Betty," remarked Jack. "She is not fond of galloping."

Of course the van was duly inspected, and the twins puzzled very much over the internal arrangements.

"I spose oo seeps on de floor. Where's oos barf?"

The questions were so numerous, it was impossible to answer. As the girls set about

preparing the tea, Jack offered to go to the Newman's for milk. Of course, the twins trotted after him, and were soon running all over the place, poking their little noses into everything.

"Yes," Jack said to Mrs. Newman, "they are Dr. Gray's twins; a charming, quaint little couple, full of mischief."

"So I've heard from the nurse's sister, who lives with us as waitress; she often repeats their funny sayings. God bless me, sir, there are no children nowadays."

As soon as Jack got the milk, he and Mrs. Newman went to hunt for the twins, who were no longer visible, and they could not be found for some time. At last they were discovered in the corner of an outhouse, holding a conversation with one of the gardeners. The man was shedding tears at the sight of them; he had just lost a little girl of his own about their age, and he was telling them how she left her mammie and daddie about a week ago, the day before her birthday, when she would have been five years old.

"Never mind, don't ki, man. God will gif her such a nice burfday party in Heaven." This remark came from Betty in a pathetic, tearful little voice.

"And did she take her dolly wif her when she flied away," asked Nancy, in a disconsolate tone.

"Bless you, my dears," sobbed the man, "and it's a drop of comfort you are pouring into my poor heart."

"Is dat what Mrs. Moffatt takes in her tea? Nana says she likes a drop of comfort in her tea." This came from the questioning Nancy.

A smile now passed over the man's face, as he looked up and saw Mrs. Newman with the gentleman.

"They're a bonnie pair," he said, "may they long be spared to their parents."

Milicent had come to fetch the children to their tea, which had long been ready. They ran along with excited faces at the thought of tea, carrying bunches of flowers Mrs. Newman had given them. Nancy suggested they should be kept for muver and nana, but Betty decided to present them to Dora, saying : " No, no, Nancy, muver's plenty fowers at home ; dese ladies hasn't got none."

Tea was an uproarious affair, and, I regret to say, milk, honey and jam fell on the pretty yellow frocks.

" Nana will be so toss," lisped Nancy. " We sood have tooked them off," and she essayed to wipe a spot with the cloth.

" Don't, darling," urged Mops, " you'll make it worse," and she tried with her handkerchief to disperse the spots.

" It doesn't matter," remarked sage Betty, " we've boo flocks for Sunday and boo bonnets too."

" Are they pale blue ? " asked Dora.

" I dunno," said the child, " but cook said we both looked like ' fork-me-nots.' Is dat pale boo, d'ye fink ? "

" What did this gentleman call you when he met you to-day ? "

" Daft dims," immediately asserted Nancy.

" Daffodils," suggested Jack.

But they were now too busy with their cake to make further replies.

" I must be off now," cried Jack, as he kissed his wife and patted Milicent's shoulder.

" Now, you two little ones, don't you think you might kiss me in this field ? It isn't a street."

" No, tisn't the street," both said, and they climbed up to kiss him, then and there.

As he waved his hand to them all, Milicent remarked : " He is fond of children."

Dora sighed, and whispered to Milly softly : "I do wish we had a little kid of our own."

"They are great anxieties, I always hear," quoted Mops. "One old lady told my mother this, which I shall always recollect, 'They are very certain cares, but uncertain joys.'"

"But surely that depends on the bringing up. These twins are very sweet indeed," and Dora sighed again, but she was thinking of what the old Gipsy had told her.

"Dere's de motor," screamed the twins together, "and mummie's tum to fetch us."

Mrs. Gray descended quickly, and, after admiring the caravan, anxiously enquired if the children had been good.

"Very good," replied Dora.

"No trouble at all," added Mops.

Both little girls hung their heads, saying together, as they always did : "We've been velly naughty, muver ; we've potted our frocks?" and they began to weep.

"Never mind," said Mrs. Gray ; you had no feeders or pinneys ; don't spoil this nice treat by tears." And, kissing them, she bade them thank Mrs. Sinclair.

"Tank oo, ladies, velly much, and may we tiss the long dawg?"

"You mean Daphne, don't you?" asked Milly.

"Yes, Daffy!" they said.

But Daphne did not appreciate the attention, and the twins were hurried away by their mother, who bid a hasty farewell to her friends.

As they were discussing their journey for the following day, saying they must be up early in order to reach Hitchin the same evening, Mr. Newman advanced, politely asking if he could do anything to help.

"I think not, Mr. Newman, thank you; we have to start very early. May we have some milk before leaving?"

"Certainly, and I will send round one of my men to harness the horse. Ladies, would you like some flowers and a cucumber?"

"That will be delightful," both agreed, "and many thanks."

Mr. Newman retired, bidding them good evening.

"Another lovely sunset," said Milicent, and she seated herself on the van steps, watching it and repeating:

"Sunset, sweet harbinger of night!
There's naught more lovely to our sight
Than the glorious orb of fiery red,
As it sinks to rest in its silver bed;
When it bids farewell to earth and streams,
And its spirits wrapped in enticing dreams.
Then, its afterglow, and twilight rests
On hill, and glade, and birds' soft nests,
While the crescent moon, in her steep ascent,
Casts a mellow glow on flowers and tent.
Myriads of stars soon crowd the sky,
And what they see would make history."

—*B. E. F.*

"Supper," called Dora, and Milicent started from her reverie. As she sprang inside, a voice greeted her: "What were you repeating, Mops?"

"It will keep. I am famished, Dodo. What a jolly meal you've prepared by yourself; it was selfish of me to moon and dream away the time like that."

"Not at all," explained Dora; "I love to hear you repeating poetry, Milly. Tell it me again, now."

"I'm not in the humour, the spell has left me," said this strange girl. She was sometimes as lively as a cricket, at others silent and matter-of-fact,

though intensely realistic. She had romantic, poetic moods, but she was never sentimental. Dora understood her perfectly; they were both keen sportswomen, and Mrs. Sinclair being the most affectionate and amiable woman possible, the give-and-take became quite easy to them both; indeed, they entwined an ideal friendship.

CHAPTER XI.

"For one and all, or high or low,
We'll teach you where you wish to go;
And one and all, go night and day,
Over the hills and far away."

—*R. L. Stevenson.*

It was a novel experience for the girls to find themselves quite alone with the caravan on the high road to Hitchin. They had to traverse fifteen or sixteen miles, and were supplied with plenty of food. Beyond resting for lunch, nothing stopped their continual progress. The day was hot, so they gave themselves up to the lazy enjoyment of driving. The way did not appear long; strawberries were in season and very plentiful, so they revelled to their heart's content in the baskets of fruit, which they procured as they travelled.

"I wonder if Falstaff will meet us before we reach Hitchin."

"Shouldn't be surprised," and as Milly said this the girls became aware of a panting cyclist behind them. The individual could not be seen for a large green handkerchief placed under a straw hat, and which fell over his face. A loose holland coat flew about him in all directions.

"Why, it is Falstaff, I do believe. What on earth are you doing with that green and yellow fichu wrapped over your beaming visage," laughed Dora.

"Heigho, alack-a-day! It's to keep off the flies; the brutes have pestered me the whole way, and I've been down the other road seeking for this blessed caravan. By my hallidame, what a pair of sunburnt wenches you both present."

"What can you expect after a month's sojourn in open air? Are you ashamed to escort us into the town?"

"Certainly not, dames! For you'll have to go through Hitchin to reach the farm where they expect you to put up for the night. By gad! Your mare looks rather done!"

Gipsy had a listless appearance, and evidently required rest and food.

"What do you propose?" asked Mrs. Sinclair.

"Stable the horse, shunt the van, and take you ladies to quaff some of the elixir of life."

"What's that?" asked Mops.

"Champagne! And this reminds me, we never had the fizz at Bedford Jack promised."

"Well! Let us speed away now to the inn where I've put up at, and I'll order dinner and fizz."

After thoroughly enjoying a sumptuous repast, the evening passed so quickly they had no idea how late it was, and set off for their destination.

It was almost dark when they arrived, and found that instead of a field, they were expected to encamp in a yard, filled with stacks but illumined by a lamp. The horses' hoofs made a clattering noise in the stables, and the lowing of cattle in the shippons, with the bleating of lambs, did not sound very promising for a rest. There was no alternative. The farmer had not liked letting a meadow, and all arrangements had been made, Mr. Bouverie thinking it would be safer for the ladies alone to be near the farmstead. He promised to fetch them early on the following morning to his bungalow.

As he left them he gave Dora a policeman's whistle to use in case they were intruded on.

They thanked him and felt quite content after bidding him good-night. Though the noise and pungent smell of the yard did keep them awake longer than usual, on rising they appreciated the can of beautiful warm milk which was handed to them quite early, and later a maid appeared with a large dish of strawberries and a jug of cream.

Dora expressed her thanks, asking if they might be allowed to look through the farm, and at the animals.

"Oh, yes," exclaimed the rosy-cheeked damsel. "I am sure the mistress will be very glad to shew you round, miss."

"I wonder why they always call me 'miss'?" said Dora in an offended tone.

"Wait till you are older, and you will be pleased," laughed Milly.

"It's rather awkward, as I am supposed to be your chaperon."

"Oh, dame propriety! What would happen if I broke the bonds of submission to your august decisions?"

At this moment Mrs. Jenkins, the farmer's wife, with her jolly-looking husband approached, and invited the ladies to inspect the farm.

They entered the long, low, old-fashioned building, covered with ivy, through a quaint doorway. For shining oak, brilliant coppers, brasses, and pewter, it could not be surpassed, and with great pride Mrs. Jenkins displayed her chest of spotless linen, and then led them into a large dairy, perfect in all its details. Buxom damsels flitted about in white aprons and cotton bonnets; all was life and business in all directions. The garden was filled with old-fashioned flowers such as moss roses,

mignonette, pink stocks, and larkspur. Large patches of borage in full bloom rivalled the summer sky in colour; old man and lavender bushes grew with sweet williams, and sweet briar, all running riot in a delicious havoc of colour and scent.

At the corners of the garden, yews were cut into Noah's Ark shaped trees and peacocks, and these gave an old-world look to this attractive garden.

"Now," said the farmer, "we must go into the yard, as I should like to shew you the hanimals." As they passed the shippons, cows were being turned out to pasturage; fine sleek creatures, some brown, others white, and piebald; fawn-coloured Alderneys, with their soft dark eyes, followed in a meek fashion.

"Them's the finest beasts in Hertfordshire and their milk is the best for miles!"

"So I should say, to judge by the cream we had this morning."

"Come and have a look at the calves. We've quite young ones."

"What beauties!" said Mops. "I think calves, next to lambs, are the prettiest animals living."

"On coorse it is a matter of taste. Now my missus favours little pigs; she says there's naught to match a sucking pig for beauty! If you come this road I'll shew you a batch on 'em."

Everywhere they went was scrupulously neat and clean, even the pig-styes, and they had to admire the little creatures.

"Where are the horses, Mr. Jenkins?" asked Dora.

"Now you are coming to my pride," and he led the way to his stables. Even an earl's stud could not be better housed than his well-bred cart horses. The girls admired and stroked them all as they inspected each one. Dora then asked the farmer if he used any machinery for his labour.

"Machinery?" shouted the man, "it's the work of the devil, saving your presence, ladies."

"But surely it is used nearly everywhere with farming implements, isn't it?"

"That's just it," he explained, "but what's going to become of the labouring man? Where we give work to twenty men, these people as uses machines to do a job only himploys two. I carn't abide them blooming steamings!"

"And so, Mr. Jenkins, you are trying to solve the problem of unemployment?" This remark was uttered by Bouverie, who had just appeared at the farm.

"The top of the morning to you, ladies!" said their friend as he shook hands with them.

"It's a long way off the top now," Dora remarked, "and we must be starting at once, or your housekeeper will be very cross at luncheon being kept waiting."

"And, faith, she's the only person I'm afraid of, Mrs. Sinclair. When offended, she punishes me by lessening her savoury dishes!"

"May we see the fowls before we go?" asked Mops of the farmer.

"This way, then, if you please, ladies," and as he took them to the poultry run, he shouted to his wife to get them some eggs and vegetables. "And tell the lads to harness their mare to the caravan," he added.

There were a number of splendid fowls of various breeds, and many hens sitting, as well as heaps of young chickens.

"Do you get many eggs?" enquired Dora.

"Yeaps! And my missus sits all the hens and rears every chicken we have got. She carn't abear them inkblaters and sich new-fangled notions!"

Dora laughed heartily at this speech, but

Bouverie added: "It's all very well, but your day will soon be over, old man; your antiquated ideas aint born for this generation. We must turn money round faster than you are content to do."

"So my lads say, but it will be time enough when I'm gone. My children have all been well eddicated; that's the tip, nowadays."

"Considering he won't have anything to do with new-fangled notions," said Milly, *sotto voce*, "eddication, as he calls it, seems to have entirely taken hold on him."

They soon followed the van out of the yard, the kind farmer's wife pressing all sorts of contributions into the van, at the same time refusing any payment.

"We have been in clover this time, thanks to you, Mr. Bouverie," said Dora, gratefully.

"Such people as these are nature's gentlefolks," quoth Milly.

"But far too antiquated for my liking," remarked Bouverie. "When everyone has been properly trained and educated, such persons will have ceased to exist."

"And more's the pity," said the girl; "but I am glad you mentioned the training along with the education; but, unfortunately, you omitted discipline, of which I regret to say there is next to none in the present day. It is absolutely iniquitous the way children are brought up."

"Sage little lady," Dora agreed, "where did you get your wise notions?"

"From my elders," she answered. "I remember translating a French quotation in which it stated that the manner of bringing up children by persuasion and too much encouragement, without any stern discipline whatever, would end in a nation of individuals utterly incapable of ruling or doing anything that was unpleasant."

"By jove, Mistress Mops, "you would make a strict mother of a family."

"And a lovable one, too, Falstaff, as well as a sensible woman." This came from Dora. "Do you feel squashed yet?"

"Not exactly," remarked Bouverie, rubbing the back of his head. "I shall have to do what the parson did."

"What's that?" asked Dora.

"Scratch my head and think."

The girls laughed and they strolled on in silence till they reached the bungalow.

CHAPTER XII.

"Every one has a fixed idea
Of what his home should be;
His was a building, low and neat,
A lawn, and an acacia tree."

"I really have never seen anything so snug and pretty," exclaimed Dora, as the van drew up to the small gate leading to the bungalow.

"Far too picturesque for two bachelors," chimed in Milly.

At the entrance stood a slim, dark man with a singularly benevolent expression for one of his age.

"Here we are at last, Benedict; stepped it all the way from Hitchin, put my cycle on the box seat and walked beside the mare."

"I began to think you had missed your road," said Horace Fraser. "Mrs. Denison is in despair, lest her luncheon should be spoiled." He then invited the ladies to enter the circular glass porch, saying he would undertake to see the van and Gipsy safely ensconced in their field.

The housekeeper met and escorted them to the cloak room leading out of the hall at the end. As they passed through the carpeted vestibule they noticed it was furnished as a most comfortable lounge, and held a fireplace with settees and revolving bookcases. The cloak room itself was fitted in an equally luxurious fashion, with another fireplace and

long cupboard running the length of the room. A round table and two arm-chairs were near the grate, and a large lavatory basin, over which hung a mirror, was fitted at the sides with shelves containing toilet requisites. The window, a bay, held cushioned seats and was filled with plants ; one door opened on to the garden and another to a staircase which led to the bathroom and sleeping apartments.

After taking off their hats they returned to the hall, out of which opened two parlours. "We have no drawing-room," excused Bouverie, "only my den and this room, where we take our meals." As he spoke, he conducted the ladies through a doorway over which hung a curtain, and they found themselves in what appeared at first rather a bare-looking apartment. The floor was covered with matting, and the same stuff went half-way up the sides, which was finished off by a wooden beading. The pale green walls were covered with pictures of hunting and fishing incidents, and over the mantel hung a large glass cupboard, containing tea and breakfast services of dainty china.

A round table stood in the centre, covered with a fine linen cloth, and on which the dinner appointments shone with excellent taste. In honour of the ladies a vase of lovely aquilegias graced the dinner table. Beyond the six high-backed oak chairs and oak sideboard, the room was empty. A pleasant but subdued light was conveyed by semi-coloured glass panes in the windows, and soft muslin curtains of a pale green conventional pattern.

On being seated, Dora and Milicent admired the flowers and the low vase in which they were placed.

"Yes," said Bouverie, "as a rule we have none on the table. When I want to look at them, I go into the garden. I find there is nothing more

delightful to look upon than the faces of my guests, and I never advocate their being hidden by forests and flower beds."

"Is this meant for a compliment?" enquired Benedict. "How have you ladies fared on your caravan journey?"

"Splendidly," answered Milicent. "Beyond the poor little drowned infant we have had no *contre-temps* whatever."

"*Umberufen! Umberufen!" called Dora.

And Milly at once rapped the table with her knuckles.

"Hello! I can have no spirit-rapping here, ladies," cried Jack Bouverie, "and what on earth do you want with umbrellas, Mrs. Sinclair?"

At this speech and his amazed expression, they all roared with laughter, saying: "Don't you know what 'touch wood' means?"

"Is that it? But here's Daphne; doesn't she want some dinner?"

"She is not used to being fed at the table, but since we have had her in the caravan, I'm afraid she is always looking out for bits."

"Well! Let us take her to Mrs. Denison," said Benedict, as he opened a door leading from the dining-room to the kitchen through an excellent pantry. The housekeeper's sleeping apartment opened out of the kitchen. "By this arrangement," continued he, "we never come into contact with the servants, but Daphne will, I am sure, receive all attention here. Mrs. Denison," he cried, "kindly feed this poor famished animal."

"Certainly, sir!" she answered. "I am very fond of dogs, as you know, and this one has the most pathetic eyes I have ever seen."

*German for "touch wood."

After leaving the pet in such good hands, the girls followed Dick Bouverie into his den, as he called it. The room was littered from end to end, chaos reigned on the tables, sofa and chairs, everything cast down into a most heterogeneous mess.

"By jove, I should have tidied this," he remarked as they entered.

"It would have been as bad in ten minutes," quoth Benedict. "Please observe, ladies, that corner near the window is mine and mine only." The writing table, revolving chair, and tidy bookshelves, gave evidence of Benedict's method and order.

"I wonder you don't come to blows," said Dora "when you inhabit this room together."

"Fortunately I can shut my eyes and ears, when necessary, to my immediate surroundings. Come, let us all go into the garden, a pleasanter and more airy place than this on such a warm day."

The parterre was not a large one, but every available spot had been cultivated with flowers, fruit trees, and vegetables; a tall acacia in full bloom stood in one corner of the garden, and from one of its branches hung a hammock.

"That is where Dick spends his time when he is not on the gad."

"A very good place, too," said Dick, "weather permitting. "I've been asleep there many a time in the pouring rain, and never roused myself till Mrs. Denison came and attempted to lug me out."

Coffee having been brought into the lounge, they soon found their way there, and they all began to smoke cigarettes and discuss their late experiences, also making arrangements for their return.

"Is your lad looking after Gipsy and the caravan?" asked Dora, "for we must be going, as I have to write and ask Mr. Cunningham if we may

camp in Brosely Park for a few days on our journey home."

"You will find Gipsy grazing in the meadow and the van sided up against some elm trees near the gate, but you must not hurry away from this, Mrs. Sinclair, as we want to show you some of the surrounding country and Abbots Langley."

"We can stay until we get a reply to my letter, then we must be moving to return to Woodfield once more."

Both gentlemen then escorted them to their camping place, and after seeing they had all they required, returned to the bungalow.

"Shall we ask them both to dine with us to-morrow, Milly, just to show how well we can manage?"

"Yes, I don't see why we shouldn't. Perhaps we can't give them a dinner '*a la* Denison,' but we could give them sufficient."

"At any rate I can offer them '*un œuf*' —enough."

"Bravo, Dora, I did not know you were addicted to making puns."

"See what I am reduced to! Let's go to roost now, for I'm really tired, Milly."

CHAPTER XIII.

"Hundreds of people can talk, for one who can think;
But thousands can think, for one who can see.
To see clearly is poetry, prophecy, and religion, all in one."
—*Ruskin.*

Our travellers had two whole days to rest, and in the evening of the following, Dick Bouverie and Horace Fraser thoroughly enjoyed the dainty dinner prepared for them by Dora and Milicent.

They sat and smoked and yarned till quite late, remaining in the meadow close to the van.

"How is it you never address us in your Shakespearian lingo, Falstaff; we have heard none of it since our arrival?" asked Dora.

"Benedict won't allow it; he says it jars on him."

"So it does," said Horace. "Falstaff was by no means one of Shakespeare's best characters, and I hate to be reminded of the vulgarian."

"Dick Bouverie seems to me always to be 'the man who talks,' whilst you, Mr. Fraser, represent 'the man who thinks,'" soliloquised Mops.

"Do you mean to convey to my mind that you believe I go one better than our friend here, Miss Foster?"

"Not exactly," replied Milicent, "but you know Ruskin said 'the greatest thing a human being could do was to see something, and tell what

he had seen in a simple straightforward manner,' and I don't know such a man."

"Of course Ruskin's saying applied simply to poetry and literature. Do you admire Ruskin?"

"I do not altogether understand his writings, and am therefore unable to appreciate him."

"Well, you are candid, at any rate. Most men and women affect understanding someone, or something, whether they do so or not."

Dora and Dick had advanced towards Gipsy, who was standing in a listless fashion in the middle of the field.

"What's the matter with her?" asked Dora. "The farmer at Hitchin seemed to think she required a rest."

"Maybe! But as you are going home so soon, Jack will, no doubt, put her out to grass altogether when she arrives and give her no further work for the present."

"She has had too much grass already; and too much green food when they are working is bad for horses."

"Tie her up to-morrow and give her some corn. Which day do you leave Brosely Park for home?"

"I haven't heard if they can have us yet, but if we go we shall probably stay till the following week."

"Will you both be all right alone?"

"Of course," answered Dora, "and Jack has promised to meet us the day we return."

The post brought the following morning an invitation from Mr. Cunningham to stay as long as they pleased in Brosely Park, and use it for a camping place. Ronald followed the invitation a few hours later, arriving in his motor car. He begged both ladies to join him in a drive, but Dora refused on the plea of being too busy preparing for their depar-

ture. However, she had not much difficulty in persuading Milicent to accompany the young man for a couple of hours. Horace Fraser had gone up to London, Dick was out in his dog cart, and Dora declared she had plenty to do attending to her duties, as she called them.

"I am awfully glad you are going to camp out in Brosely Park, Miss Foster," said our young friend, as he drove her off in the motor. "I have arranged a truly rural and also convenient spot for you to camp in. It is not very far from the house, but quite out of sight, and you can fix yourselves up there and be quite independent. Mrs. Sinclair seems determined to stick to her caravan, and will not forget her simple life for any inducement one tries to offer."

"I quite agree with her; it would never do to interfere with our present mode of living. Besides we have only brought clothes along with us to suit this sort of thing."

"But you will allow me to take you on the lake, won't you? And surely you will condescend to a game of tennis. My sisters will be much disappointed if you don't. They are indefatigable at the game and archery also. Does Mrs. Sinclair play?"

"Sometimes, but she is not very keen."

"Well! I expect she and my mother will hob-nob over the poultry and the kitchen garden."

The conversation drifted on to topics of the day, and Ronald found his companion fascinating and anything but commonplace, while she was much attracted by his melodious voice, and her attention drawn to the graphic way in which he depicted his travels in foreign countries and the description he gave of the many people he had met; in addition to this, his sportsmanlike instincts made a pleasant impression on the girl, who listened with a rapt expression to all he had to tell her.

Ronald was twenty-eight years of age, not handsome, but with a good-looking face and clever grey eyes that had the habit of scrutinizing from under their dark eyebrows everyone he came in contact with ; his clean-shaven mouth was firm, and possessed an excellent set of teeth ; he was of medium height, with a strong athletic form which moved with an easy grace, and as his manner was particularly courteous to ladies in general, naturally he was much sought after.

Being an only son and having lost his father very soon after he came of age, his mother and two sisters were entirely dependent on him. This, coupled with the fact that he managed his own estate, no doubt was a sufficient reason to bring out the young fellow's best qualities. He also had the good fortune not to be spoiled or influenced by his relations.

He had come across many girls and women of varied style and beauty, and not a few had ventured to try and secure his affections, but so far he had remained quite heart-whole.

Milicent Foster, as she sat beside the young man, in some strange, unaccountable manner, attracted and fascinated him. Her usually pale face was now touched with a charming colour, the rapid motion through the air having an exhilarating effect. Her beautiful eyes shone with a *naivete* and unconsciousness of self, which held him spellbound for the time being. On reflection he was struck with her extreme neatness and daintiness, though in the midst of her caravan life, which at times must have been of a strenuous nature ; and, last but not least, he was captivated by the deep, low, musical tone of her voice.

The drive was only too short for both of them, and after having tea in a picturesque cottage garden,

Milly was made the happy possessor of a lovely bunch of roses, which perfumed the air as they motored back to the bungalow.

As they arrived, Mr. Fraser returned the same moment from London.

"Any news in the city?" asked Ronald.

"Nothing of much interest; perhaps you have already heard the Lords have thrown out the Budget," exclaimed Horace.

"That was only what we expected," answered Ronald.

"By gad, it will be the ruin of the country," spoke Bouverie.

"Away with your radical notions!" cried Mrs. Sinclair, disgustedly. "Falstaff, I shall begin to think you are an anarchist."

"Please don't let us discuss politics here," repeated Mops; "it will spoil everything."

"Quite right, Miss Foster," ejaculated her admiring swain; "it will not suit the caravan simple life, and must be kept away from the bungalow in the presence of ladies."

"I am sorry to say farewell, but it is only '*auf wiedersehen*,' for shall we not meet again to-morrow?"

"We hope so," said Mrs. Sinclair. "Many thanks for taking my friend for a drive, Ronald."

"It has given me the greatest pleasure," answered he, and, bowing to Mops, he entered his motor and was soon out of sight.

"It strikes me ye are making a conquest, Mistress Mops. A bonnie hostess you'll make at Brosely Park."

"Really, Falstaff, you are too bad. Why on earth will you always persist in prophesying such very ridiculous ideas?" replied the girl in an annoyed tone.

"It's rather premature, isn't it?" muttered Benedict, as he entered the bungalow.

"A thousand pardons!" apologised Bouverie, as he fell in a sleepy fashion into his hammock.

"Granted," shouted Milly, as she escaped with Dora through the gate, back to their caravan.

CHAPTER XIV.

"To see her, is to love her,
And love but her for ever;
For nature made her what she is,
And ne'er made such another."

The following morning our caravaners bid farewell to their kind friends and pleasant encampment.

Mops had the extreme felicity of entirely harnessing Gipsy, climbing on a stool to place the collar round the mare's head. With the help of Mr. Bouverie's lad, the van had been cleaned up and polished. Gipsy, much refreshed with her rest and feed of corn, easily drew the van through the excellent roads which led them to Brosely Park.

On arriving at 7 p.m., one of the gardeners met and took the mare close to some palings which enclosed a poultry run within earshot of the house, hidden by chestnuts, and other trees covered with dense foliage. Here and there bushes of syringa and lilac shed a delicious perfume, mixed with the scent of roses from the rose garden near to. The girls at once set about preparing their evening meal, and an hour later Mrs. Cunningham arrived with her son to welcome them. She was a handsome, dignified old lady, sweetly courteous and gracious in her reception of Mrs. Sinclair and her friend.

She was followed by her two unmarried daughters, Marjorie and Violet.

The elder girl was by far the most amiable, and her sporting instinct, with a dramatic talent, rendered her a general favourite. She was a tall, well-formed girl, and her chief beauty consisted of a wealth of auburn hair.

Violet, the younger, was undoubtedly beautiful and quite conscious of it. Her engagement to an officer in India completely took up all her attention, and she appeared always dreamy and *distrait*, but she condescended to admire the caravan, and addressed a few syllables to Milicent, who was soon seized upon by Ronald to reconnoitre the grounds.

Mrs. Cunningham marched off Dora to look at her poultry run, where Marjorie soon joined them.

As the two young people neared the house, Milicent was interested to observe it was an Elizabethan mansion of extensive proportions, with mullioned windows and a stately arched doorway which opened upon a large porch filled with plants and old curios.

The parterre outside the western wing was redolent with beds of flowers, edged with box ; a fountain played in the centre, and on a lawn, filled with shrubs of all descriptions, stood a large sundial.

As Ronald and Milicent reached the end of the lawn, they came upon some very wide stone steps, filled with moss and lichen. These steps led to the border of a lake in the midst of which lay an island covered with white and yellow broom, interspersed with hybrids and rhododendrons ; these shrubs also embellished the banks of the lake, over which hung larches and beeches, with a variety of trees.

Close to a boat-house on the opposite side lay a quantity of water-lilies, while the southern portion of the lake, at its narrowest point, was crossed by a

small stone bridge, and beyond which played a cascade of foaming water, fed by the stream that ran into it, and which fed the lake.

"This is simply exquisite," exclaimed Mops, as she gazed on two swans wending their stately way towards their nest and young cygnets near the island. "What a romantic spot!" she continued. "I am expecting every moment to see a lady with powdered hair and patches sail down that terrace," and she sang a verse out of "An Old Garden," beginning with "In her petticoat of satin and her gaily-tired gown."

Her deep contralto voice struck on Ronald's ears with a peculiar charm, and, as she ceased, he said: "To-morrow I will take you to the terrace in the kitchen garden, and there you will conjure up all the old-fashioned visions you can imagine, whilst I relate to you some quaint and interesting anecdotes connected with our family history. After that I will show you the house, and the old oak and historical pictures."

"I shall be most interested in it," exclaimed Milicent; "this place reminds me of Haddon Hall. Have you ever been there, Mr. Cunningham?" she enquired.

"Indeed I have," he answered; "it is one of my favourite show places in England, but alas, already it is fast becoming spoiled and down-trodden by objectionable tourists."

"It is an awful pity," reflected Milicent, "that so many of our historical houses should be made into show places for the common herd. I mean by this, of course, those who are incapable of appreciating, and would never dream of honouring such surroundings."

"The common herd, as you aptly term them, would never agree with you, for their chief idea is

to visit these places in as short a space of time as possible, endeavour to cram in all that has to be seen in one glance, so as to be able to say they have seen it; but, as to entering into the interest or pathos connected with these places, such sentiments only belong to the few!"

"How strange!" exclaimed the girl in a low tone. "It is always the ancient and the past history of people and places that appeals strongly to me; in a similar manner, I am invariably longing to visit unknown spots, step on untrodden ground, and search for hidden mysteries."

Her companion remained silent, but he was specially conscious at this moment of a subtle charm this young girl conveyed to him. Surely it was not mere infatuation; there was so much vivacity and reality about her that he was scarcely startled when she exclaimed in a different voice:

"There are your mother and Dora. I want to hear about the poultry, and learn if Dora has received any fresh hints from Mrs. Cunningham as to the keeping and breeding of fowls."

"Have you any peacocks?" she heard Dora ask; "they would look very handsome in these beautiful grounds."

"Someone told us they were unlucky," exclaimed Marjorie. "But do come inside, Mrs. Sinclair, I declare it is becoming quite chilly."

"I think not to-night," said Dora. "We are rather tired and anxious to get settled. Are you ready, Mops?"

But Mops was at this moment watching Violet as she stood on the steps of a French window at the back of the mansion; it was surrounded with jessamine and honeysuckle, and the lovely girl in her white dress and pale blue scarf, with her yellow hair

looking white as if powdered in the moonlight, appeared to Milicent as the lady of her dreams. For, as she advanced to meet the party, Milly asked herself where had she seen that vision before? It was one of those flashes which cross many of us for a moment, and haunt us long after. She had seen it, she felt sure. Yes, it was in a dream, she said to herself, the scene had been present to her—sometime long ago, perhaps. It was an impression, a lasting one, never to be forgotten.

She was aroused from her reverie by Dora placing her arm through her own, and saying softly: "We had better go now, Milly," and they bid the three ladies "good-night."

As they turned down the path leading to the place their caravan occupied, Ronald offered to accompany them. After entering their van and lighting the lamp the girls stood on the steps chatting. Ronald was loth to leave; they both looked so picturesque in their bright cotton gowns and Panama hats thrown back from their sunburned faces. Milicent's eyes were brilliant with enjoyment and pleasure, as she waved him farewell. Ronald passed on to the house, but stopped to listen, for Milly was singing in her sweet voice: "Somewhere the sun is shining." A strange thrill passed over the young man as he heaved a sigh, for he knew now he had met his mate.

On the third night after their arrival, having enjoyed a game of tennis, some boating and motoring, and also a musical evening, Dora and Milicent retired to rest very tired and sleepy. They slept soundly, but were startled at 1 a.m. by Daphne growling and sniffing at the van door. On sitting up, they fancied they heard footsteps and low whisperings outside.

"Who can it be?" said Mops under her breath.

"Hush," answered Dora; "listen while I raise the window a little further."

The moon was so brilliant they did not require a light, and they craned their necks to hear. Presently a voice was heard saying: "Is there ony one in that 'ere bloomin' van? Where is that confounded dawg? We shall get copt if yer don't moined!"

"Hold yer noise, will yer," said another voice. "I knows that van; there's only two females insoide, but the blasted dawg will raise the 'ouse."

Mops then put her head through the window, and saw two men creeping stealthily under the bushes from the direction of the poultry yard; they appeared to be carrying a couple of dead fowls.

"They are robbing the poultry," she whispered. "Dora, quick, look!"

As Dora peeped, one of the men looked up, and from under his cap she immediately recognized one of the gipsy men they had met. Reluctantly, she called to Mops to get the whistle.

"Dare you blow it?" she asked.

"Rather," answered the girl, and she turned to whistle from the opposite window.

She was a good hand at this job, and as she whistled several times, the sound went up loudly and shrilly. The men, after swearing, and evidently supposing a policeman was not far off, ran scampering through the park as fast as their legs could carry them.

In the meantime, Ronald, roused by the continuous whistling, for he slept with his window wide open, summoned the footman, and, hastily throwing his ulster over his pyjamas, rushed out into the drive. The footman followed in his wake; both of them held pistols filled with blank cartridges, but this the girls did not know, and they were in abject terror as

they heard the pistols fired, fearing someone might get shot.

"Oh dear," sighed Dora, "if anyone is shot, it will be an awful business, and we shall get hauled up as witnesses."

They now ventured to open the door of the van, having put on their slippers and ulsters.

Before very long Ronald broke upon them to enquire how they fared, as from the barking of Daphne he felt sure they were awake, and he had a strong conviction it was these two brave girls who had blown the whistle! There they both stood with their splendid hair all down their backs, and their nightdresses and slippered feet peeping beneath their ulsters. Daphne was racing about, and Dora was trying to call her in and pacify her. Ronald, not a whit abashed in his long coat and tousled head, advanced, saying: "Did you two blow that whistle?"

"Well, Mops did," explained Dora, "but I fear we have brought you out to no purpose."

"Indeed not," he replied; "we've given those gentlemen a jolly good fright; they dropped the two fowls and Creighton picked them up, and has taken them in. Gipsies, of course; there are a lot of them thieving and knocking about."

"They must live, poor things," muttered Milicent.

"Yes, and at other people's expense," said Ronald; "but I must say you are a deuced plucky couple and ought to have medals, at least, after this night's affray."

As he said this, he glanced at Milicent with an admiring gaze, for her pale face, lit up with her glorious eyes, and her golden hair streaming down her shoulders in the moonlight, gave her an ethereal, weird look, which haunted him and kept him transfixed to the spot.

But Dora, who did not feel quite at her ease, hastily bid him return to the house out of the chilly night air, then wishing him "good night," she soon shut the caravan door. They heard him whistling as he went the air of "The moon hath raised her lamp above," and with this tune ringing in their ears, laughing, they proposed to brew some tea by the aid of the spirit lamp. Morning dawned before they were again wrapped in slumber, and it was pretty late when they arose to prepare their breakfast.

They found themselves quite the heroines of the hour, and even Violet was deeply interested in the night's adventure, Marjorie greatly regretting she had not been one of the party. Mrs. Cunningham was much perturbed at the interference with her poultry, but nothing could be done, and Dora and Mops were secretly glad the gipsy had escaped scot free.

On Sunday both girls joined the Cunninghams in attending service in the beautiful old church; even Ronald was of the party, as anywhere Milicent went Ronald was sure to follow.

Dora and her friend lunched at the Cunninghams, as they had no time to prepare their own meal. A cheerful afternoon followed, Ronald shewing many of his curios amassed abroad.

Tea was set in the grand old hall, filled with beautiful old oak, priceless china, etc., and they enjoyed it to the tunes, first from the gramaphone and then from the pianola.

The next day was fixed for their departure, and many regrets were expressed by each member of the family, who had thoroughly enjoyed the freshness and brightness brought by these two girls into their midst.

Milicent had charmed them with her singing

and Dora by her playing, for she was an excellent musician. Ronald discovered Milicent was very fond of riding on horseback, and offered her a mount, but, as she had no habit, he proposed to call at Woodfield some day and bring a horse with him for her to ride, and they would go out together.

Milicent readily agreed to this suggestion, and, secretly hoping to bring matters to a climax, Dora Sinclair invited the young man to stay the night after their return to Woodfield. Ronald accepted the invitation with great alacrity in the presence of his mother and sister, who, whatever they thought, with their usual tact and good breeding refrained from making any remarks, though, no doubt, they felt as many other mothers and sisters do, that no girl was sufficiently good or fit to make a match with the adored son and brother.

Dora, on the contrary, was exceedingly anxious to forward what appeared to her a very eligible marriage for her friend, and she thought there was no mistaking Ronald's increasing admiration for Milicent, but, like a wise woman, she made no remarks or suggestions to her friend concerning the fast-growing intimacy between these two young people, but let things take their own course. She knew that to chaff Milicent or to refer to the subject in any way was to put the girl quite off, and might end by making her constrained and unnatural with the young man.

So, after many thanks for the hospitality received, and promises of further meetings, our caravaners once more, and for the last time, struck camp, and were soon on their journey homeward.

CHAPTER XV.

"When presages gloomy and sad arise,
Look hopefully on, nor mind them;
If coming events cast their shadows before,
There is always a light behind them."

"I don't know what's the matter with me this morning, Mops, but I feel very depressed."

"Is it because our journey is coming to an end, I wonder?"

They were seated on the box seats of the caravan, and were going slowly along a flat road.

"I certainly feel as if a cloud were hanging over me," answered Milly, "but I think, as you say, it is because our delightful trip is drawing to its close."

"I hope Jack will meet us; we shall want him if we are late."

"Of course he knows what time to expect us. I wonder if he will cycle or come on foot?" asked Mops.

"He will probably motor, and send us back in the car with Whelpton, whilst he brings Gipsy home himself. I rather dread that long hill for her; one really ought to have two horses to go up it."

"I wonder," added Mrs. Sinclair, "what Jack will say to your conquest, Milicent."

"My conquest, Dora? What do you mean?"

"Now, my lady fair, don't beat about the bush; you know better than I do that Ronald Cunningham

is quite smitten with you, and if you like him, dear, there can be no objection, of course; but Moppie, my friend, it will always be impossible for me to know whether you really care for anyone or not."

"And wouldn't it be very foolish of me to shew any particular liking for any man before he has made himself known to me as a lover, at least? Not that I have anything against Ronald Cunningham, quite the reverse, for I look upon him as a man, and that comprehends everything to a woman, unless you expect me to say a gentleman in every sense of the word."

"Milly, when you say this to me I know you mean a very great deal, because, like myself, you can only admire or feel safe with what is manly and gentle."

"But, Dora, my sweet friend, surely you are rather premature?"

"I think not," she answered slowly; "when I have convictions they take a strong hold upon me."

"And is this what is depressing you, Dodo?" asked Mops in a low voice.

"Surely we should not lose your friendship, Milly dear, were you to get married?"

"What are you talking about, Dora? Do look! We are going right into that cart full of hay," and down the girl jumped to lead Gipsy to one side of the road.

"We may as well stay here now and have our lunch," said Dora, "and let us feed Gipsy. It is past one o'clock." The mare took a drink, but would not touch any food.

"She certainly seems out of sorts, and yet she has not been over-worked lately."

"No, it is not that. I think she has had too much grass for the work she is doing; she is not breathing as usual, is she, Mops?"

"No," said the girl, as she patted and stroked the bonnie creature.

"Won't Mrs. Loftus be pleased to see you again. She must have been rather tired of being so much alone."

"My mother has so many resources I don't think she would ever feel dull, Milly."

As the afternoon wore on, they became more and more surprised at not seeing Jack arrive, and they were now nearing the long hill Dora had spoken about. Both girls were walking, and as the sun declined they did not feel the heat so much. A fragrant whiff of clover came from some uncut meadows as they passed down the high road. They were about four or five miles from Woodfield.

"Don't you recognize the smell of home?" asked Dora. "I always think this part of Essex has a peculiar smell of its own. Whether it is the earth, the cows, or the hedges, I can't say, but there it is, and I should know it with my eyes shut."

"Well, you don't smell with your open eyes, do you?" laughed Milly.

Some children they met coming home from school began to play round the van, and evidently irritated the mare. Mrs. Sinclair spoke to them several times, telling them to run away, but it was not the slightest use; they continued to fly round. Milly took the whip, and touched one of the elder boys with it; the lad only yelled, and said in an aggressive voice: "I'll fetch my father to you!" Fortunately a labourer passed at that moment, and on the ladies appealing to him to drive away the urchins, he very soon dispersed them, for which he was given a shilling, of course.

"It's really too bad," said Dora. "One can do nothing with these children nowadays! They have not the smallest idea of obedience. Once out

of school they run riot over the country roads and cities, playing with their tops and hoops on the pathway ; it is really most dangerous to pedestrians and to themselves, with so many cycles and motors."

"I know it is," replied Milicent; "I hear that in some places they are rink-skating on the roads. I have given up Sunday School teaching in despair ; it is impossible to manage them. My mother says obedience is a virtue discarded, and no one ever thinks of keeping a promise. Certainly, insubordination and 'do as you like,' as well as an unseemly rush for everything appears to be the order of the day."

Then Dora added : "Let us hope, after this decade, things will be better. After all, we are living in a transition age."

They had now reached the hill up which Gipsy had to toil, and it was evident she strained very much as she went up.

"I wish we had another horse to assist her. Do help me, Mops, to push behind."

Of course even the united efforts of the two girls was not of any use to the poor beast ; they then tried putting stones behind the van to rest the mare, but this was worse, for, on her restarting, all her efforts were used, and she evidently was not capable of the strain.

Dora and Milicent were in despair, and just as they were putting on the brake and the shaft rest the poor creature fell, never to rise again ; she did not die immediately, but, when she did breathe her last, a couple of men who passed did their best to free her from the shafts, whilst Dora and Milly, on their knees, were stroking and patting the dead animal. When Jack and Whelpton arrived in the motor car, Jack Sinclair was not surprised to find his wife and Milly reduced to floods

of tears, as he gazed on the poor dead animal who had so bravely dragged their temporary home for so many miles. For the time being both girls were quite inconsolable, and he hastened to hurry them into the motor, ordering Whelpton to drive them to Woodfield at once, giving directions for him to procure another horse to take home the van. He knew it would be a tremendous business to remove the dead cart-horse, and until this could be achieved he arranged to stay where he was. Mrs. Loftus was standing at the front door, when the motor drew up at the entrance ; both girls sprang out at once, and Dora threw herself into her mother's arms, weeping copiously. Naturally Mrs. Loftus expressed great surprise at the unexpected manner of their return.

Milicent explained to her the loss they had sustained, and as they went into the drawing-room poor Dora said : " Did you ever hear anything more sad ? Such an ending to the most delightful of trips, mother."

" Well, to tell you the truth," replied the lady, " I am so thankful to see you both home safe that I can scarcely realize the death of poor Gipsy."

The girls were not allowed to see the mare again, and, acting on Mrs. Loftus' and Jack's advice, both retired early to rest that night. Their sad loss did not interfere with their sleep, though both of them felt they could never look back on that caravan tour without a shade of sadness.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Sweet is the wooing that's not long in doing."

"Oh, mistress mine, where are you roaming ?
Oh ! stay and hear ; your true lover's coming ;
Trip no further, pretty sweeting,
Journeys end in lovers meeting,
Every wise man's son doth know."

—*Shakespeare.*

Very late the following morning Milly appeared at the breakfast table, and was greeted by an exclamation from Dora as she kissed her: "Ronald Cunningham has certainly not wasted any of his time. He writes to say he is bringing over a mare of his for you to ride to-day, Milly. Did you arrange with him to do this so soon ?"

Milicent blushed as she answered : "He did say something about fetching me for a ride, you remember, Dora, but I never dreamt of his coming for me to-day."

"And he supplements his offer with a request," said Jack, winking at his wife

"A request," repeated Mops.

"Yes, dear ; he wants to know if we can stable both horses and give him and his groom each a room for to-night."

"I must say he is rather cool," remarked Mrs. Loftus.

"On the contrary, Grannie, he is absolutely blazing with impatience to behold Milicent once more!"

"How often has he seen her?" asked the old lady.

"Many times, mother; we stayed in Brosely Park, you know, I told you, for four days."

"What a singular proceeding! Such things as these never happened in my young days."

By this time poor Milly was the colour of a peony, but she managed to bury her face in her coffee cup and was much relieved when she heard Jack say: "Of course, Dora, you must manage to put Ronald up. I am sorry I shall be out till evening, but no doubt you two ladies can amuse him as you have hitherto done."

"Of course I can," answered Dora, "but be home as early as you can, Jack; you will be back to dinner, I suppose?"

"Certainly, unless anything unforeseen prevents me. I may bring Bouverie back with me."

"I hope not," murmured Mrs. Loftus; "he will decidedly be one too many here to-night."

Both girls skipped away to their duties, for there was plenty to do, as Mrs. Sinclair had been away for more than a month. The morning passed rapidly; a spare room had to be prepared, flowers arranged in the drawing-room, and the luncheon table to decorate, with extra dishes to cook. They both studiously avoided the caravan, for they could not bear to look on it since it had lost its gallant steed.

"Will you put your riding habit on before lunch, Mops?" asked Dora.

"Perhaps I had better do so, as it will save time."

"Yes, and it will show Ronald you intend to accept his offer of a mount, and that you intend to accompany him," laughed Dora.

As Milicent was donning her riding habit, she saw from her window Ronald Cunningham trotting up the drive; behind him rode a groom leading a beautiful-looking mare with a side saddle on. The girl was not long in tucking up her hair and putting on her hat; she then flew downstairs in time to see Ronald vanish into the drawing-room with Dora, and from there she could watch the horses being led to the stables.

A sudden fit of shyness overcame her, and she fled to the conservatory, trying to compose her fluttering heart.

"Why am I so stupid," she said to herself; "he does not really care for me, of course; he is just amusing himself. All men like to make up to girls whom they meet for the first time; but," she reflected, "his voice is so tender, and his eyes eloquent when he addresses me. He is certainly very fascinating, but most likely he looks at all women as if they were the one woman in the world for him. Most men do this and mean nothing," and our little damsel sighed profoundly as she reasoned with herself. Gradually she recovered her equilibrium and was quite ready to reply to Ronald's "good day, Miss Foster," as Dora led him into the conservatory. "I see you are quite ready and equipped for our promised ride," Ronald ventured to add.

"Oh, was it a promise?" exclaimed the girl. "I had quite forgotten. It was Dora who made me put on my habit, saying I might as well be ready, as you had written to say you were coming to fetch me."

All this was repeated in rather a strained manner, and Ronald could not imagine what had happened to the lady of his dreams; however, with his usual tact, he immediately referred to the loss of poor Gipsy, expressing his sorrow in a pathetic tone.

"It was indeed a sad ending to a charming trip," she managed to say in a tearful voice, "and I do hope she did not die of overwork."

"No," said Dora, "the vet. told Jack this morning there was something wrong with her heart and she would have died in any case; nevertheless, I shall always feel the additional strain of that last hill finished her."

The luncheon gong now sounded, and they turned into the dining room, where Mrs. Loftus awaited them. Ronald set himself to entertain the old lady during the repast, thereby ingratiating himself in her favour.

"I hope the mare you have brought Milicent to ride, Mr. Cunningham, is a quiet one?" enquired she.

"She is as quiet as a lamb, my dear lady; and, as I am told Miss Foster is an excellent horsewoman, there can be nothing to fear!"

"I like an animal with some spirit in it," said Milicent, as she gathered up her habit. "Dora, can you lend me a riding whip?"

"You will not require to use it. Ruby moves with the rider's every gesture," said Ronald. "But do as you like." The girl was soon mounted, and highly pleased with the little animal that carried her. They trotted out of the gate and were soon cantering on some of the green swards which lined the roads.

Ronald was pleased to find his little companion had a splendid seat, and that she looked as well on horseback as she did anywhere else.

He was fully aware she had a reflective mind and strong will of her own. He gathered this from the conversations he had had with her, but he knew there were hidden depths of feeling which he was sure he could bring to the surface if he once could be assured of her confidence and respect. As a

matter of fact, it was as the gipsy told her ; she had already had her feelings roused and then trampled on, and as a burned child dreads the fire, so did this gentle girl dread a renewal of any such incident.

The young couple remained out riding till tea time. Every now and then Ronald made advances and endeavoured to secure a glance from his companion's lovely eyes, but she always cantered off and only met his disconsolate looks with merry laughter as he gained her side once more. At one period of the homeward ride, when she tried to reach a branch of honeysuckle, he endeavoured to detain her, and ask her if his ardent love was returned, but she escaped, and Woodfield was reached, and the pair dismounted without so much as a passage of love between them.

Tea was not quite ready, and Milicent rushed off to change her riding habit.

From the exceedingly depressed condition of Ronald, Dora feared Mops had refused him ; there was no accounting for the vagaries of this girl, she thought in her own mind.

Milicent appeared at tea in a white muslin frock trimmed with yellow ribbons, and as the sunlight shone on our golden-haired damsel, she regained her spirits, and Ronald recovered his lively demeanour. Both Mrs. Loftus and Dora left the young people together, but as soon as Mops found herself alone with Ronald she jumped up, seized some sugar, and declared she was going out to give it to Ruby. Needless to say the man followed, until he reached the girl in the stables, and found her patting and stroking the mare's glossy skin.

"She is a real beauty, Mr. Cunningham, and, as you say, gentle as a lamb, with a very soft mouth."

"Would you like to have her?" asked Ronald.

"For my own?" enquired Mops. "Yes, but what could I do with her in a town? We live in a large city."

"But why not live in the country?" he asked in his low, fascinating voice.

"Because it is impossible," she answered, and away she flew out of the stables into the rose garden. Still the man followed, he was fast becoming desperate; but as she came to an arch covered with Dorothy Perkins roses, she leaned against the seat which stood under it, and looking down caught an Allan Richardson rose in her hand and began to smell it.

"May I cut you this bloom?" he asked. "It will match your ribbons and your ——."

"Skin?" suggested Milicent, mischievously, but as she uttered these words she ventured to look round at Ronald with her yellow-brown and green eyes. She was surprised to see how pained and serious his face had suddenly become. At this her woman's heart was at once touched, and she said gently: "Yes, please, cut it for me."

As he was taking away some of the thorns before handing it to her, he asked in his low, melodious voice: "Miss Foster—Milicent—will you give me something in exchange for this rose?"

The girl remained silent now, for she was trembling violently. Ronald, becoming aware of this, took her by the hand and placed her on the seat.

"Milicent," he spoke again, "don't you understand? I want you to give me yourself, your precious little self, my golden princess."

The rose fell in her lap, she took it up and slowly placed it in her belt, then raised her glorious eyes to his earnest grey ones.

Ronald felt sure now his love was returned, but before he addressed her once more, she said in a very

subdued tone: "Ask me again, Ronald. I wish to be quite sure that you really want me."

"Want you? Of course I do, 'heart of gold'; will you give it into my keeping?"

"Yes, Ronald, it is yours, now and for ever." Then gently laying her hands on his strong ones, she surrendered herself to the supreme happiness of the moment, for he was beside her now and his arms were around her. They were quite unconscious that Mrs. Loftus was calling to them from the other side of the garden. Being very short-sighted, she had not in the least realized the state of affairs.

When they did hear her, they rose at once, and walked silently towards her. As they drew nearer, Milly shyly slackened her pace, but Ronald went straight up to the old lady, saying: "Mrs. Loftus, Milicent has promised to be my wife. Will you give your consent?"

She was completely startled, but, before she could utter a word, Milly had thrown her arms round her neck, saying: "Dear Grannie, I'm so happy; I can scarcely believe it is true!"

"Well, well!" exclaimed Mrs. Loftus, "I congratulate you both, but, Mr. Cunningham, isn't this rather sudden?"

"It has been a quick wooing, dear lady, but a very sweet one. Now we must go and seek Mrs. Sinclair, to tell her of our happiness. Where is she, my fairy princess?"

Milly now thrust her arm into Ronald's and led him into the drawing-room, where they found Dora writing letters.

"Queen of the caravan," said Ronald, addressing her, "I have come to rob you of your Gipsy Princess. May I keep her?" As he said this he knelt on one knee, still holding Milicent's hand.

Dora rose at once and seized her friend's other hand, and placing it in Ronald's, said : "Take her, take your Gipsy Princess, as you call her ; she is indeed worthy of you, and may you always guard and keep her as she deserves, Ronald Cunningham."

"By my hallidame, thou scurvy varlet, hast thou been stealing—no, kidnapping, Mr. Ronald?" And Mr. Bouverie's broad and beaming countenance appeared above the screen. "Hello! Here, Jack, a pretty scene I've been witnessing! Here's our pal Ronald kidnapping the Gipsy Queen."

"And he is right welcome to her," said Jack, heartily ; "that is to say, Mops, dear, are you willing?"

"Yes, Jack. I've found my mate, and we are going to ride away together."

"Milly, old girl, have you given up caravaning because poor old Gipsy is no more?"

"No, indeed," cried Ronald ; "we are going to spend our honeymoon in a caravan of our own. Milly has just consented."

"Well, all I can say, it is our loss but your gain, old chap. Who is going to caravan with Dora now?"

"And who is going to bully me, I should like to know." This remark came from Dick Bouverie, as he made a pretence of weeping.

The lovers now withdrew to the window to discuss as to how they were to make known their betrothal to the members of their family.

"I will go North to-morrow, little woman, to claim you from your father."

"But your mother, Ronald? Will she be satisfied with me for a daughter-in-law?"

"Mother always has approved and always will love anything that belongs to me. All I have will be yours now, golden heart, and may I give you

Ruby, now that you have agreed to live in the country for the rest of your life?"

"Yes, indeed. And I shall value her as I shall value everything you give me in the future, including yourself, Ronald."

And here we must bid farewell to our caravaners and their friends; for

"Love is the great amulet, which makes the world a garden! And Hope, which comes to all of us, outwears the accidents of life and reaches, with tremulous hand, beyond grave and death. It is also both easy and grateful to believe."

—*R. L. Stevenson.*

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